

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**February 2014**

**Vol. 119, No. 2**

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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Nature of Truth*

I WILL compare truth to a corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls—in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must. What is writ is writ. I am so, so sorry, Sister, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood. But I cannot. I have suffered for it all my life. But I cannot. I have essayed and essayed. But I cannot. At last I have given it up. The Lord is great. He will not allow me to become a hypocrite. Now let what is in come out. I have not found a way that will please all, and I cannot but be what I am, true to my own self. “Youth and beauty vanish, life and wealth vanish, name and fame vanish, even the mountains crumble into dust. Friendship and love vanish. Truth alone abides.” God of Truth, be Thou alone my guide! I am too old to change now into milk and honey. Allow me to remain as I am. “Without fear—without shopkeeping, caring neither for friend nor foe, do thou hold on to Truth, Sannyasin, and from this moment give up this world and the next and all that are to come—their enjoyments and their vanities. Truth, be thou alone my guide.” I have no desire for wealth or name or fame or enjoyments, Sister—they are dust unto me. I wanted to help my brethren. I have not the tact to earn money, bless the Lord. What reason is there for me to conform to the vagaries of the world around me and not obey the voice of Truth within? The mind is still weak, Sister, it sometimes mechanically



clutches at earthly help. But I am not afraid. Fear is the greatest sin my religion teaches.

Dream no more! Oh, dream no more, my soul! In one word, I have a message to give, I have no time to be sweet to the world, and every attempt at sweetness makes me a hypocrite. I will die a thousand deaths rather than lead a jelly-fish existence and yield to every requirement of this foolish world, no matter whether it be my own country or a foreign country. You are mistaken, utterly mistaken, if you think I have a work; I have no work under or beyond the sun. I have a message, and I will give it after my own fashion.

---

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 5.76–7.



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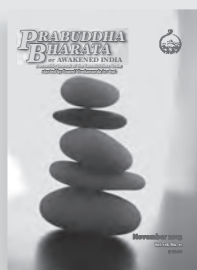
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This is the Hindi version of the English Film 'Vivekananda by Vivekananda' which was released in January 2012 and the same was well received by devotees, admirers of Swamiji, and general public. Tamil version of the Film was also released last month under the title *Vivekanandarai Patri Vivekanandar*. The DVD (PAL) is available for sale on Chennai Math's online Store at the link:

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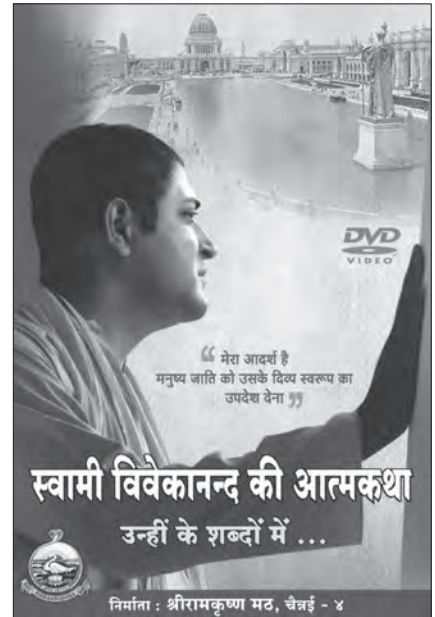
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Concept, Script, Screenplay and Direction: Karthik Saragur.

DVD Price: ₹ 150/- + Postage: ₹ 50/-for single copy.



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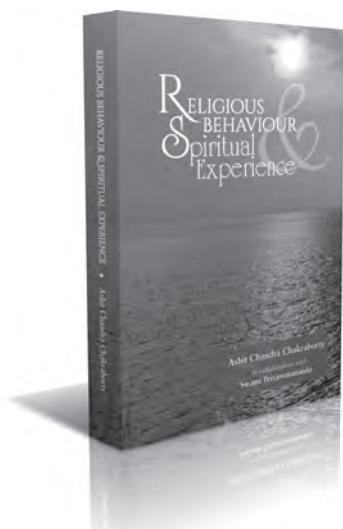
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राथ वरान्निबोधत ।

*Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## **Meditation on ॐ**

February 2014  
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तान्यभ्यतपत्तेभ्योऽभितप्तेभ्य ओंकारः सम्प्राप्तवत्तद्यथा शङ्कुना सर्वाणि पर्णानि  
संतृण्णान्येवमोङ्कारेण सर्वा वाक्संतृण्णोङ्कार एवेदः सर्वमोङ्कार एवेदः सर्वम् ॥

He (Prajapati) meditated with regard to them (the worlds). From them, which were meditated on, issued Om. For instance, as all leaves are held together by (their) midribs, in this way all the words are joined together by Om. Om is indeed all these. Om is indeed all these.

*(Chhandogya Upanishad, 2.23.3)*

ऋग्भिरेतं यजुर्भिरन्तरिक्षं सामभिर्यत् तत् कवयो वेदयन्ते ।  
तमोङ्कारेणैवाऽऽयतनेनान्वेति विद्वान् यत्तच्छान्तमजरममृतमभयं परं चेति ॥

The intelligent know this world that is attainable by Rig mantras, the intermediate space achievable by the Yajur mantras, and that which is reached by the Sama mantras. The enlightened man attains that (threefold) world through Om alone; and through Om as an aid, he also reaches that Supreme (Reality), which is peaceful and beyond old age, death, and fear.

*(Prashna Upanishad, 5.7)*

ओं अन्तश्चरति भूतेषु गुहायां विश्वमूर्तिषु । त्वं यज्ञस्त्वं  
वषट्कारस्त्वमिन्द्रस्त्वं रुद्रस्त्वं विष्णुस्त्वं ब्रह्म त्वं प्रजापतिः ।  
त्वं तदाप आपो ज्योती रसोऽमृतं ब्रह्म भूर्भुवः सुवरोम् ॥

That Supreme Being moves inside the heart of created beings possessing manifold forms. O Supreme, You are the sacrifice, You are the expression Vashat, You are Indra, You are Rudra, You are Brahma, You are Prajapati, You are That, You are the water in the rivers and the ocean, You are the sun, You are flavour, You are ambrosia, You are the body of the Vedas, You are the three worlds—*bhuh, bhuvah, suvah*—and You are Om.

*(Mahanarayana Upanishad, 68.2)*

# THIS MONTH

Old ideas of sacred space and reverence for the holy are being replaced by startling new concepts, a consequence of the tremendous rise of knowledge. **Universal Reverence** examines the trend and points to its ultimate fulfilment.



Many problems of the modern times have solutions embodied in the Holy Mother's life. Sudesh Garg, a long time devotee from Chandigarh, writes about **The Holy Mother and God's Motherhood**.

Nileen Putatunda, a poet and author from Kolkata, presents in **Nag Mahashaya: King of Lovers** the saint's life of holiness, self-surrender to Sri Ramakrishna, and God-consciousness.



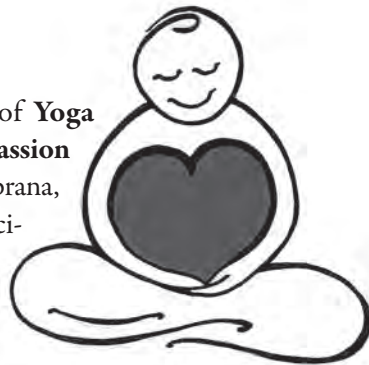
Jashobanta Roy, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Radhamadhab College, Silchar, delineates the **Path to an Ideal Society** according to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.



In **Swami Vivekananda as a Social Scientist** Dr Biswaranjan Chattopadhyay, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Serampore College, West Bengal, deals with Swamiji's practical Vedanta as the need of the hour.

In the final part of **Yoga Therapy of Compassion**

Pravrajika Brahmaprana, of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, points out the power of compassion to transform lives. This lecture was part of the interfaith lecture series at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Dallas.



In the second part of **Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: Two Teachings or One?** Arpita Mitra, PhD in History from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, shows how the Master and the disciple spoke the same language.



Dr Anil Baran Ray and Dr Sukanya Ray highlight, in the concluding part of **Role of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in Human Development**, the relevance of these saviours of humankind. The former is a retired Professor from the Burdwan

University; the latter is an assistant Professor of Social Sciences at Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata.



## EDITORIAL

# *Universal Reverence*

THERE ARE JUST A FEW places remaining in the world which have not penetrated and transformed today's fast-paced society. Besides these few places there are fewer pockets left where people still live like their ancestors did thousands of years ago. These few places and pockets are like curios or relics of the past, surreal and unimaginable. Hearing about these places and people, some become nostalgic about their lost innocence, simplicity, living with raw nature, and so on. But daily life for people with ancient lifestyles is not charming, as it requires a tremendous struggle to survive. Some societies, though equipped and swamped with modernity, cannot rid themselves of their medieval mindset and look on modernity as an enemy. And because this enemy is everywhere and faceless, there is random targeting at and general anger towards modernity for disrupting so-called comfort zones. However much the opposition, nobody can deny the benefits or stop the pace of ultra-modernity. This pace, of social and individual progress, is humankind's attempt at finding more room to grow. Humanity is pushing the boundaries of time and space further and further back. As we keep pushing at the physical and mental horizons, through knowledge, we find our existence anchored in those vast spaces and mind-boggling times. We are learning that our origins and ultimate fate is bound to the ancient and expanding universe. This pace of human civilization is actually due to our impatience to find answers regarding existence. As we progressively grew from tribes and clans to villages, towns,

cities, and megacities, we mingled more and expanded our mental horizons. For centuries the Earth and the solar system were all that we knew. This cocoon is now broken for us to see that the universe is our home. We are cosmic beings living for now on planet Earth.

The one big complaint against the ultra-modern civilization is that we lack the reverence our ancestors had. Older generations were marked by ideas of sacred space, time, form, and holy people. This irreverent behaviour of the young is what makes the older generation mad at them. The young say the ideas of the sacred were confined, narrow, parochial, fanatical, and the cause of much fighting and wars. People protected their particular sacred space with their lives and desecrated and destroyed others' sacred spaces, times, and forms, while destroying the believers as well. This confined sacredness to people, places, and things was limited by their limited knowledge. As knowledge grew and people and places became understood, the old ideas of reverence and sacredness did not correspondingly grow. And the reason, the younger generation says, is that their knowledge of sacredness was based on old religious books with archaic world views.

The older generation also speaks of science as antithetical to the sacred. But it is science that is really responsible for bringing in reverence for all life forms, the environment, and the whole universe. An increasing knowledge of life and the world enhances the sense of beauty, truth, and love. Today people are beginning to see the



universe in this light. Swami Vivekananda says that human knowledge is not antagonistic to human welfare.

It is wrong to say there is irreverence in today's world. Reverence is present, placed not on particular places and things but on a person's knowledge, qualities, talents, compassion, love, seva, and so on. Reverence is natural to all beings; it is just that people have broken the old bounds of sacred space. There is something in us that makes us acknowledge, applaud, celebrate, and emulate human qualities that border on the Divine. And this reverence is paid wherever and in whomever it is found. In the Bhagavadgita Bhagavan declares: 'Whatever object is verily endowed with majesty, possessed of prosperity, or is energetic, you know for certain each of them as having a part of my power as its source.' Moreover, people may not venerate, bow, and scrape themselves on the ground like the olden days, but they understand and acknowledge the old truth spoken by Manu: 'Learn the way to freedom, even if it comes from a Pariah, by serving him.' This is a better and truer way than being confined to only one particular area. The whole universe is now looked at with awe and reverence, just as our ancestors reverentially looked on certain places, times, and deities. In short, knowledge has given us the scope to extend the bounds of sacredness and become reverential to everything. In our fast-paced civilization we have left behind many ideals, and this is the sign of progress. We do not have to hug old ideals based on partial knowledge; that is the reason why old gods and temples are being bypassed. Or we can say that these old ideals and gods have grown along with our expanding knowledge, becoming universal now. They have broken the bounds we had put them in for so long.

When one looks at the picture of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, there is something

tangible but indefinable that strikes us deeply. Her picture looks vaguely familiar. This is felt not only by Indians or South East Asians but by people all over the world, from different races, cultures, and backgrounds. There is also a natural reverence that rises on seeing her sublime and compassionate face. And in case one happens to read her life and teachings, then that vague feeling is confirmed, and reverence becomes established. She looks human and also divine. 'This infinite and all-embracing Motherhood of hers spoke so sweetly through every word, every movement and every act, that a mere touch of it melted the hardest heart.' The Holy Mother frequently declared: 'I ... am the Divine Mother', 'People say, I am Kali'. She was the Mother of all beings and of the universe, and her every thought and act was a proof of this fact. Even Sri Ramakrishna said: 'I see you as the Divine Mother', and worshipped her accordingly.

It is natural for humans to seek their origins and that of the universe. This search is leading us to the Holy Mother, for she is Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge and learning. In our quest we were in reality seeking the Mother, and that is why on merely seeing her picture a strange recognition flashes in our minds. As Mother is the source of all knowledge, she is also Lakshmi the source of all powers, beauty, qualities, and talents. By acknowledging and reverencing these qualities in people we are reverencing and worshipping her presence in us. As knower, knowledge, and the object of knowledge are invariably connected, we feel that connection. The monastic and non-monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had a glimpse of her real nature and were transformed into spiritual giants. Humanity is rushing towards the one Nag Mahashaya described as 'kinder than Father (the Master)'. Our fast pace is due to our impatience to return to the Holy Mother.



# The Holy Mother and God's Motherhood

Sudesh Garg

WHAT WOULD the Divine Mother of the universe look like if she incarnated on earth in flesh and blood? The answer is the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Many people might gasp incredulously, but studying just a few incidents of her life will remove several doubts, as the Holy Mother is a unique revelation of God's motherhood. We encounter in her simple acts, sentiments, and casual utterances, an unbounded grandeur of overwhelming maternal love.

## Silent Service

When the Holy Mother was still a little girl living in her village of Jayrambati, the whole countryside was devastated by a terrible famine. Her loving tenderness could be seen as she helped cool, by fanning with her delicate hands, the hot *khichuri*, rice mixed with lentils, prepared by her parents for the starving people. Even as a child she helped her mother in all domestic chores and looked after her younger brothers.

One is wonderstruck at the Holy Mother's self-effacement in serving Sri Ramakrishna, his aged mother, and innumerable devotees at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna's health had suffered as a result of his tremendous tapasya and frequent experience of samadhi. The prasad from the Kali temple was not easily digested by him, so there was none except the Mother to cook soups and curries suitable for his delicate stomach. When he sat to eat, she talked about some light mundane matters lest his mind soar to a higher region making him oblivious to meals. And in how many ways did she coax

him to eat a little more. If ever the Mother happened to be away at her village home, he sent her repeated messages to return. What childlike dependence on the Mother's protective care the avatara had! Although she was used to the open spaces and serenity of her village, she happily stayed in the cramped octagonal Nahabhat room at Dakshineswar, with all its inconveniences. No discomfort could touch her if it was for Sri Ramakrishna's service.

When devotees began to visit Sri Ramakrishna, she cooked what was suitable for each of their individual tastes and digestive capacities. Without a trace of annoyance or tiredness she served them happily, while radiating compassion and bliss.

Overwhelmed with agonizing grief, after Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886, the Holy Mother wondered why she should live any longer. Nothing would have stopped her from merging into Brahman, or donning the robes of a sannyasini and leading a life of contemplation. But she could not do this because of her all-encompassing mother's heart. Moreover, Sri Ramakrishna, who was cognizant of her divinity, appeared to her and told her to stay in the world—she had a significant role to play in his mission of spiritual regeneration of humankind. In a vision the Holy Mother saw Sri Ramakrishna pointing to her insane sister-in-law's crawling baby girl and asked her to hold on to that girl—who he said was *yogamaya*, divine power—in order to provide an anchor for her mind, which tended to lose itself in lofty spiritual planes. That girl was named Radhu.

### **Veiled Divinity**

People failed to recognize the Holy Mother's divinity, veiled in the garb of motherly affection for all creation. Who could gauge the Mother's spiritual magnitude in the midst of her utter rural simplicity? One sees her always engaged in cooking, scouring vessels, meticulously discharging her duties, and intensely involved in the domestic problems of her brothers. By accepting and undergoing day-to-day problems, and at the same time observing a life of detachment, self-control, forgiveness, and fortitude, she has exemplified the perfect life of a householder. She showed that every duty and action performed selflessly for the welfare of others was as good as performing spiritual practices.

What inhuman tortures Surabala and her

daughter Radhu subjected the Mother to! Surabala constantly quarrelled with the Holy Mother and once even attacked her with a firebrand under the wrong notion that the Mother had taken Radhu's jewellery. She did not know that her own father, knowing her deranged mind, had taken them away for safe keeping. Despite the Mother's tender solicitude, in a fit of insanity Radhu once hit her hard with a big brinjal, causing the Mother to cry out in pain and making her back swell. Sometimes Radhu would take food in her mouth and spit it on the Holy Mother. Could the Mother put up with such behaviour if she did not possess inexhaustible strength and patience? Revealing her real nature, the Mother said: 'Look my dear, know this body (showing her own) to be a divine body. How much de-

filement and insult could it endure? If it is not a divine body, can any human being endure so much? ... Look, my dear, as long as I live, none of these can know me. Later they will understand everything.'<sup>1</sup>

After Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi*, the Holy Mother lived in Kamarpukur in dire poverty. She would tie knots to repair her torn sari and turn the soil with a spade in order to grow some greens for food. At times she did not even have salt to season her boiled rice. Unlike Sri Ramakrishna, she did not sing, dance, laugh, and weep with divine joy; the mode of expressing her infinite power was through motherliness and suffering.

There were occasions when absorbed in thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, she would lose





all outer consciousness in deep samadhi and become one with him. All her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna himself once revealed in a vision to Yogin-ma, who was the Holy Mother's constant companion, that Mother was pure as the Ganga and he and she were identical. The Mother was one with Sri Ramakrishna, as well as his extended being.

Sri Ramakrishna was intoxicated with the love of God, and the Holy Mother was full of love for all created beings. They were not just the obverse and reverse of each other but one and the same reality. Sri Ramakrishna showed how to be carefree and blissful as a child lying on the Divine Mother's lap; she, the Divine Mother, took all on her lap, unmindful of their faults, failures, lapses, and limitations.

The Holy Mother could be described as *mahamaya*, the great power of God. Even those born in her family lived under the notion that she was merely their sister, sister-in-law, or aunt. Her brothers always pestered her for money and never asked for knowledge or devotion. It took some time, even for the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, to realize that Sri Sarada Devi was not just the consort of their guru. She was the cosmic Shakti released into the world to lead many to eternal life, to soothe numberless hearts by absorbing their sins and woes into her bosom. The Mother as *bhukti-mukti-pradayani*, the bestower of worldly welfare as well as liberation, would reveal herself whenever there was a pathetic cry from one of her helpless children.

Girish Ghosh visited Jayrambati in 1891 and was astonished to see the Holy Mother. It was she who had appeared to him long ago in a dream as an effulgent goddess, when he was in the grip of cholera with no hope of recovery. She cured him by putting some prasada in his mouth. During Durga Puja at Belur Math in 1916, Swami

Shivananda wrote in a letter: 'Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother, it has altogether been a direct worship (and not merely worship of the goddess in an image). Although there was continuous rain and storm on all three days, yet by the Mother's grace, no part of the celebration suffered. And it even happened that just as the devotees sat for taking *prasada* the rain stopped.'<sup>2</sup> Once, moved by her nephew Shivaram's persistent entreaties, she revealed herself as the Mother Kali, who had accepted his entire burden of karma. Shivaram at once kneeled before her and chanted a famous shloka from the *Chandi*, which begins with '*Sarva-mangala-mangalye*; who is the auspiciousness in all the auspicious' (432).

By a mere touch or benign glance the Holy Mother could break the bonds of karma, alter divine dispensation, and avert calamities. Could she have accepted the adoration and worship of the *yugavatara*, avatara of the age? Could she, if she was not the *adyashakti*, primal Shakti, be able to accept Sri Ramakrishna's fruits of sadhana during the *shodashi* puja, worship of the Divine Mother as a teenage girl?

### As a Guru

After Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi* it was the Holy Mother who carried on his mission of spiritual ministration for thirty-four years. Whether in Jayrambati or Calcutta, devotees swarmed about her, irresistibly drawn by the subtle power of her love. There used to be a continuous stream of eager souls who wanted to be sanctified by touching her feet, seeking initiation, and taking sannyasa. This was particularly true when she was at her village, where, laying aside her veil and palanquin, she moved about freely and was easily accessible. Even as a guru she bound all to her by her maternal love. Her door was open to all; no one was a stranger.

She recognized all her children in whatever garb they appeared—brahmana, shudra, foreigner, relative, saint, sinner, learned, or ignorant. Like the goddess Annapurna, she fed them all with delicious dishes she cooked, removed the plates after they had eaten, cleaned the place, and bid them adieu with eyes filled with tears. One day after the meal, some of the disciples were about to clean the dishes, when the Mother prevented them: 'No, no, leave them. You are beings whom even the gods treasure.'<sup>3</sup>

She nursed her children in sickness as well. She massaged Swami Arupananda's head with a paste of ghee and camphor to relieve him of his headache. A young boy named Govinda, who tended the cows, was cured of a persistent itch by a paste of neem leaves and turmeric made and applied by the Mother herself. Brahmachari Jnan—later Swami Jnanananda—could not eat with his hands because of painful itching, so the Mother mixed rice and curries and put morsel by morsel in his mouth. In 1891, during the Jagaddhatri Puja at the Mother's house in Jayrambati, Swami Saradananda and others were laid up with malaria. In those days milk was not easily available in Jayrambati. She moved from door to door, limping due to rheumatic pain in her legs, collecting milk by ounces till she got enough for their diet. Her actions were reminiscent of Sri Ramakrishna's, who once said to his beloved Naren, the future Vivekananda: 'Alas! For your sake I could beg from door to door.'<sup>4</sup>

Seared in the fiery furnace of the world, countless devotees came to the Holy Mother seeking help. Her love did not allow her to refuse spiritual succour, even to the worst type of sinners. Who else but the Mother of the universe could bear the responsibility of the fallen and the degraded? Her life was to be a solace to thousands of ordinary people as well as to spiritual seekers. All those who sought mantra *diksha*, initiation,

were blessed with potent mantras and were filled with peace and bliss. She initiated eager aspirants at any hour, at any place, and under any circumstances. All considerations of her personal suffering or the status of the person to be initiated were brushed aside. Even when she was not well, she initiated a Parsi devotee. She initiated Brahmachari Girija during her period of mourning after her eldest sister-in-law had died of cholera. She even initiated in an open field a youth just released from police custody, and in another situation initiated on a railway platform a porter who weepingly beseeched her. To a pure soul she gave a mantra of her own accord. Impelled by divine mercy she did not refuse even criminals and took upon herself the burden of their sins. As a result, she often suffered from various physical maladies and a terrible burning sensation in her feet, which she had to repeatedly wash with Ganga water. Swami Premananda once remarked that the Mother, by giving refuge to all and accepting the sins of all, was digesting the poison they could not take. Had they done so, they would have been burnt to ashes. The repeated entreaties of Saradananda and others not to initiate people any more, particularly after her last illness, were of no avail. 'This body will die some day, but let them be awakened.'<sup>5</sup>

Many came and took initiation with earnestness. Some did not do japa and other spiritual disciplines regularly, while others neglected it altogether. The gracious Mother who had shouldered their burden would forego sleep and perform japa for their welfare. She had grown so weak that she could not sit for long. She would also pray to Sri Ramakrishna to arouse their spiritual consciousness and grant them liberation from this world of sorrows. It is interesting to note that the Mother did everything not only for those who practised sincerely but even for those who neglected their sadhana. Mahendranath

Gupta, on his arrival at Jayrambati in 1915, imagined that any meditation or japa undertaken at the holy village of the Mother's nativity would lead to greater results. Therefore, he overdid these one day. When he went to salute the Mother, she said: 'Now that you are with your mother, what's the need of so much *japa* and meditation? I, indeed, am doing everything for you. Now eat and live merrily, free from all care.'<sup>6</sup>

The Holy Mother showered her blessings equally on householders and her all-renouncing monastic children. Many were granted *sannyasa* by the kindly Mother. She no doubt held the monastic life of renunciation, self-sacrifice, and celibacy in high esteem and yet, as the *antar-yamini*, the indweller, did not give *sannyasa* indiscriminately. She knew that everybody had a measured role to play in Sri Ramakrishna's divine play and that everybody was not fit to lead a monastic life. Reading the future of the aspirants with her insight, she asked some to lead the life of householders and at the same time to call on God. She reassured them that there were quite a number of good householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. To those who had the strength of mind and spirit of renunciation she gave the vows of *sannyasa*. Once when a young man received the ochre robe from her, one of Mother's aunts remarked: 'Sister-in-law has turned that boy into a monk' (343). And Maku joined in saying: 'With what expectations the parents of this boy brought him up; and all these are now dashed to the ground! Marriage, too, is a virtuous act in this world. If aunt goes on making monks in this way, Mahamaya will become angry with her' (ibid.). The Mother said: 'Maku, they are all divine children; they will live on this earth as pure flowers. ... Haven't you seen into the happiness of this world? I am getting my very bones scorched by the fiery ordeals of your family lives' (343-4). Though she granted *sannyasa* to many,

it hurt her mother's heart to call her children by their monastic names. 'My Naren,' 'my Sarat,' 'my Yogen,' this is how she addressed them. It was she who interceded with Sri Ramakrishna, weeping profusely, that her children might have a permanent habitation and not wander from place to place for a morsel of food. On 21 August 1911, when Swami Ramakrishnananda entered *maha-samadhi* at Udbodan, she lamented sorrowfully, 'My Shashi is gone; my backbone is broken' (255). On 30 July 1918, at the passing away of Swami Premananda she wept bitterly and said: 'Baburam ... was so very near to my heart!' 'She laid her head at the feet of the Master's picture ... and cried out with a heart-rending wail, "Master, so you have snatched him away!"' (289). What infinite motherly love and solicitude for her monastic children and the Order!

Once, during one of her visits to Bangalore, the Holy Mother and her women companions were taken by Swami Vishuddhananda to the cave temple of Gavipura. On their return to the ashrama, the Mother was moved to find the whole compound crowded with people seeking her darshan. As soon as they saw her, they prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother stood there motionless for about five minutes and extended her arm in benediction. Hers was the language of the heart, through which she transmitted transcendental bliss. No words were needed; no questions were asked and yet all the devotees' doubts were solved. Earlier at Madras by her power of silent spiritual ministry, she had initiated many Tamil girls. She was able to make them understand the mantras and the process of japa and meditation without the help of interpreters.

### **Mother's Boundless Freedom**

Come one and all! The Holy Mother is waiting with open arms to embrace all in her oceanic heart. Anyone can call upon her at any time, at





any odd hour of day or night, in rain or shine. Worry not about the time of her rest or convenience, all her time and toil is for our sake. Worry not if you are poor and have nothing to offer her, have not read a single scripture, or have committed many blunders. Her very sight would fill you with indescribable joy. Her very glance would make you a saint, freeing you from all restlessness due to desire for sensuous enjoyment and material gains. She is none other than the Divine Mother descended in this valley of woes to take us across this transmigratory ocean of life and death.

A girl desperately wanted to see Mother, but her husband did not approve of it. So she pressed Kshirodbala, her friend, to accompany her to

Mother's house after her husband had left for the office. It was Mother's rest time when they arrived. Golap-ma scolded Kshirodbala for bringing the girl at that time and disturbing Mother's rest. After a while Kshirodbala heard Mother calling her: 'Who is this girl, dear? Did Golap scold you, because you have come at this hour? Well, it is the Master's kingdom! No rules and regulations are valid here. Here the door is open to all. Whenever one gets the opportunity one may call on me.'<sup>7</sup> 'What law would freedom bind? / What merit guide Her will, / Whose freak is greatest order, / Whose will resistless law?'<sup>8</sup>

In those days when girls were not sent to school, Mother educated her nieces Maku and Radhu, made them read out religious books to her, and had her letters written by them. Golap-ma said that Radhu was grown-up and there was no need of sending her to school. Mother said: 'Let her go

to school. She can do immense good to others if she gets education and learns some useful arts. She has been married in a backward village. Through education she will not only improve herself, but will be able to help others.'<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Mother was known for her tenderness and Golap-ma for her outspokenness, yet they were intimately bound to each other. This difference in temperaments did not ever so slightly ruffle their relationship. Golap-ma and Yogin-ma were her holy companions. She took their advice in all matters except regarding the welfare of her children.

Transcending all superficial barriers of colour, food, language, dress, and customs, geographical and cultural barriers as Europeans, Americans,

Indians, she held all in the cosmic sweep of her maternal embrace. How could she run her 'universal' house without including everybody? She was the epitome of traditional and cultural values and would not let any caste or creed prejudices smother her personal freedom in a field that was eminently her own. Her heart was the meeting place where people from different lands and climes gathered, ate the same consecrated food, and lived in harmony.

To the horror of her orthodox companions she talked freely with foreigners, caressed their chins, and even ate with them. The Western ladies were fascinated by the 'stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind.'<sup>10</sup> They also recognized in her 'a yearning love that can never refuse us.'<sup>11</sup> Swamiji was delighted to see the Mother conferring upon his foreign devotees a sense of dignity and the sanction to accept them in the Order.

The Holy Mother worshipped Sri Ramakrishna as her Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal, revered him as her guru, and served him. Yet, in her domain of motherhood, she would not let even him curb her freedom in any way, just as Shiva lies prostrate under Kali's feet while she, the cosmic mistress, dances her cosmic dance. One time at Dakshineswar, the Mother was visited by a woman who had led a loose life in her youth but had turned to spiritual life in her old age. Noticing this,

The Master's sense of duty warned him that Mother should be protected from the company of persons who might come with impure motives. Besides, it might arouse adverse criticism from worldly-minded visitors. So he said with disdain, 'Pooh, pooh! a public woman! To think of chatting with her! What a nasty idea!' The Mother certainly understood the need for caution. Whatever might have been her past, she now trod the path of virtue and looked upon the Holy Mother as her own mother. How could Mother then drive away one who

wanted to be comforted—the Mother whose life was to be solace to thousands of sinners and spiritual wanderers? ... for the sake of mere social propriety! The conversations, therefore, went on as before. The Master too, intuitively understanding the Mother's feeling, did not refer to the matter again.<sup>12</sup>

On another occasion the Master gladly ate the food brought by a 'mother's daughter' who had led an impure life. Sri Ramakrishna was immensely delighted to see the universality of her motherly sentiment that she could not refuse anything to anybody who called her 'mother'. Sri Ramakrishna allotted each one of his monastic devotees a fixed number of chapattis, flattened bread, so that they could practise deep meditation. But the Mother could not be satisfied unless she had fed them to their heart's content. When Sri Ramakrishna found out and objected, she told him not to worry so much because Baburam had eaten just two chapattis more. Sri Ramakrishna was relieved because she had taken upon herself the responsibility of feeding the devotees as well as caring for their spiritual welfare. It was she who guided them in every critical situation, stretching her vision beyond that of an ordinary mortal. Taking shelter at her feet everyone, even spiritual giants like Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, felt safe.

### ***Beg only from Her***

One day the Mother was explaining that since human gifts do not last long, one should not beg from people, nay, not even from one's father or one's husband. Then she added: 'When the Master gives, it overflows all limits' (495). How true! When Sri Ramakrishna gave, he gave without calculation, for he knew no mathematics. The same was also true of the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna had seen Girish's play 'The Life


of Chaitanya' at the Star Theatre in Calcutta. He asked Girish if he could show him another of his plays, but said Girish must charge something. Girish said: 'All right, you may pay eight annas.'<sup>13</sup> Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Then you must take one rupee' (ibid.).

One day Sri Ramakrishna told his young disciples that he desired to eat the food they could obtain by begging. At this Naren and others decided that the first person to be approached should be the Holy Mother. The Mother gave them sixteen annas. Sixteen annas make one rupee; sixteen stands also for fullness or abundance. Thus the Mother signified her bestowing on them all that they could wish for. Throughout her life, whoever supplicated her with whatsoever desire—be it for removal of afflictions, wants, relief from physical maladies, or spiritual illumination—she fulfilled their needs.

### Universal Mother

The Mother said that if a thorn pricked anyone's foot, it hurt her like a spear. If any one of her children was not well physically or mentally, it was she who suffered, for all bodies were hers, all minds were part of her cosmic mind. It was the beginning of the year 1899, Swami Yogananda lay seriously ill at Mother's rented house in Calcutta. Whenever his condition deteriorated, the Mother became correspondingly emaciated; and whenever he felt better, it produced a corresponding elation in her. She was the bereaved mother and burst into loud wailing with a mother who had lost her young earning son. She identified herself with the sorrows of the whole world. It was she who suffered the agony of the woman who was heartlessly beaten by her husband. But when she was ill herself and could not eat anything, she consoled the devotees telling them that it was she who ate through their mouths. Even when in good health she would be

satisfied by feeding her devotee children sumptuously. Once one of the devotees asked her: "Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?" The Mother replied, "Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat."<sup>14</sup>

The Holy Mother's life is a striking manifestation of God's Motherhood, unprecedented in the history of the world. Gently and imperceptibly her divine love has entered the very core of humankind. Who else but the universal mother could give this abiding assurance to millions throughout the world: 'Destiny dare not throw my children into hell. Free yourself from all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and lead you to the everlasting domain' (403). 

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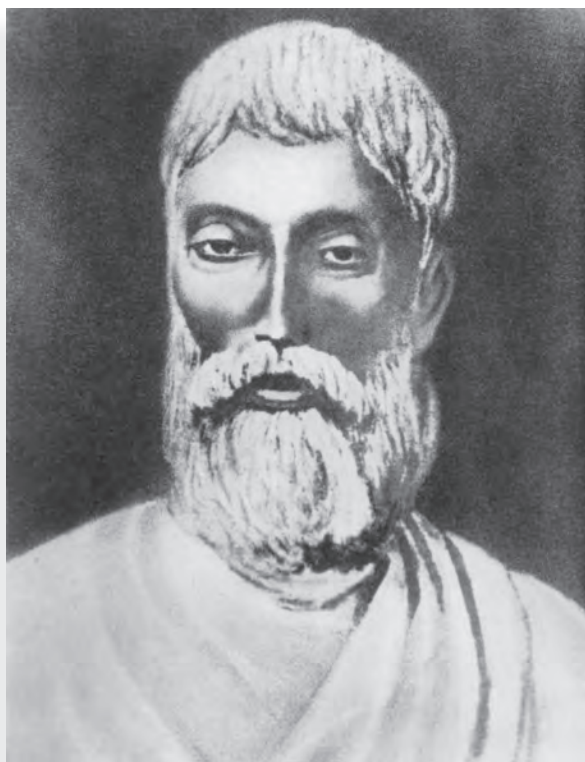


# Nag Mahashaya: King of Lovers

Nileen Putatunda

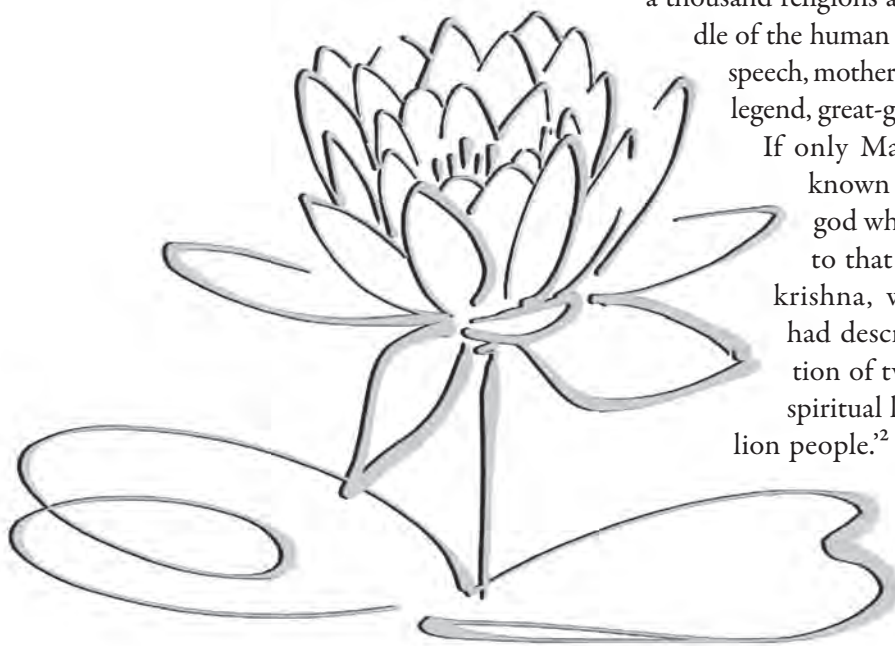
CAN AN ANT COMPREHEND the majesty of a Himalayan peak? It is with this sense of near impossibility that I set out to share my feeble grasp of a saint as great as Nag Mahashaya (1846–99). He was one of the outstanding householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and a source of inspiration for millions of devotees.

In the late nineteenth century Mark Twain (1835–1910), the legendary American writer and lecturer, wrote: ‘This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and



elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of a hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition.’<sup>1</sup>

If only Mark Twain had met and known Nag Mahashaya, a living god who had consecrated his life to that God of gods, Sri Ramakrishna, whom Romain Rolland had described as ‘the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.’<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I will focus on three facets of Nag Mahashaya’s personality: his incredible intensity, humility, and purity.



### Intensity

Nag Mahashaya was born Durgacharan Nag in Deobhog, a small village located a mile from the port of Narayanganj in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. He lost his mother when he was eight and was brought up by a loving aunt. The young Durgacharan was no sports enthusiast, but sometimes, at the insistence of his friends, would participate in their games. He was such a lover of truth that he was unable to speak a lie even in jest; so much so that if any of his friends lied, he would dissociate himself from that person. He was often asked to play the role of a mediator when a dispute arose and, knowing his fairness, his friends accepted his decision unquestioningly. But the love of truth can often come at a cost. On one occasion some naughty boys wanted Durgacharan to lie in order to win a game, but he refused and so they lost. Furious, they dragged him through a rice field till he was cut and bruised all over.

He later returned home in pain without a murmur of complaint against anyone.<sup>3</sup>

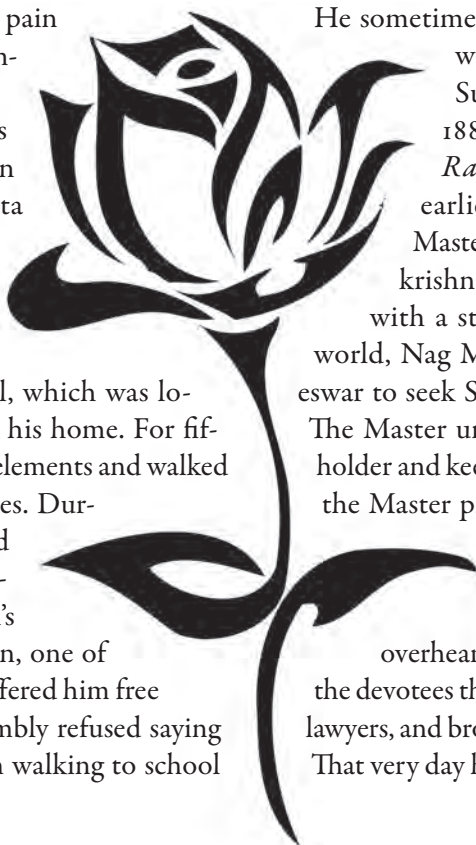
After completing his eighth grade, Durgacharan wanted to go to Calcutta to continue his studies, but his father did not have enough money. He then decided to attend the Dhaka Normal School, which was located ten miles away from his home. For fifteen months he braved the elements and walked back and forth twenty miles. During this period he missed just two days of school! Impressed with Durgacharan's sincerity and determination, one of the teachers of his school offered him free board and lodging. He humbly refused saying that he had no difficulty in walking to school

and returning home. Having mastered Bengali he wrote beautiful essays on religion and the way to build character, which were later published as a pamphlet titled *Lessons for Youths* and distributed for free.

While at Calcutta, Durgacharan discontinued his studies at the Campbell Medical School after a year and half. He studied homeopathy under a famous Calcutta physician Dr Behari Lal Bhaduri. He excelled immediately and even as a student performed remarkable cures. He had no fixed fee; whatever people offered he accepted, provided it was not in excess of what he thought was fair. The poor were treated free and would sometimes be given money by Durgacharan for their food and medicines. Once he cured a critically ill patient in the house of his father's employer and in gratefulness was offered a silver casket full of rupees. He politely declined and asked for only twenty rupees, the legitimate charge.

He sometimes went to the Brahmo Samaj with his friend and neighbour Sureshchandra Datta, who in 1884 wrote the *Paramahansa Ramakrishner Ukti*, one of the earliest published books on the Master. Both of them met Sri Ramakrishna probably in 1883. One day, with a strong desire to renounce the world, Nag Mahashaya went to Dakshineswar to seek Sri Ramakrishna's permission. The Master urged him to remain a householder and keep his mind fixed upon God—the Master prophesied that his life would serve as an example of how a householder should live.

One time Nag Mahashaya overheard Sri Ramakrishna tell one of the devotees that it was very hard for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to realize religious truths. That very day he threw his medicine box and





books into the Ganga, took his bath in it, and came home. He then took over his father's job and began devoting more time to meditation.

When Nag Mahashaya went to visit his father, Dindayal, at their village home, he saw a cow tied near the corner of the house struggling to reach a pumpkin plant grown by his sister. Out of compassion he untied the cow so that it could eat. Dindayal was livid and told his son that instead of earning anything for the family, he was actually harming it. How would he propose to maintain himself? Nag Mahashaya requested Dindayal not to worry, that God would take care of him. Dindayal scornfully agreed saying that his son would go naked and live on frogs. Immediately, Nag Mahashaya took off his clothes, picked up a dead frog from the courtyard, and started eating it. He then pleaded with Dindayal to chant the Lord's name and not be engrossed in mundane matters in his old age.

During Sri Ramakrishna's last days, when he was suffering with throat cancer, Nag Mahashaya had gone to visit him. The Master asked him if he could cure him, as the doctors had given up all hope. Thinking for a while, Nag Mahashaya resolved to draw, by his tremendous will power, the fatal disease from the Master's body into his own. Sri Ramakrishna understood what Nag Mahashaya had in mind and pushed him away saying that he knew he had the power to cure him.<sup>4</sup> There are numerous other incidents that showed Nag Mahashaya's unimaginable intensity, and a spiritual aspirant should be cautioned not to blindly ape the great saint's ways, for that could be dangerous. It is not for nothing that Sri Ramakrishna said that Nag Mahashaya was like a 'blazing fire'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Humility**

In the first half of the fifteenth century Thomas À Kempis has written in *The Imitation of Christ*:

'Indeed a humble farmer who serves God is better than a proud philosopher, who, neglecting himself, considers the course of the heavens. He who knows himself well, is vile in his own eyes, and is not pleased with the praises of men.'<sup>6</sup> Nag Mahashaya received abundant praise from Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and the other direct disciples of the Master. Swamiji said that the whole of East Bengal was blessed by the birth of Nag Mahashaya. Yet, Nag Mahashaya was the very embodiment of humility.

In his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, Nag Mahashaya wanted to take the dust from the Master's feet, but Sri Ramakrishna withdrew his legs and did not permit him to touch them. Nag Mahashaya consoled himself thinking that he was unworthy to touch the feet of such a great saint and with a heavy heart sat at the farthest end of the room. When Nag Mahashaya began visiting the Master at Dakshineswar more often, he would avoid going on Sundays, as he felt he was too unaccomplished to go on Sundays when pundits and many great persons would visit. While walking on the road Nag Mahashaya would not go ahead of another person, for that showed self-importance. He would not allow anyone to prepare tobacco to smoke for him, though he would delight in doing so for others. While travelling by boat he would not permit the boatman to row and would ply the oars himself. He would not even allow the roof of his thatched hut to be repaired by anyone. His philosophy was that he was Bhagavan's devoted servant and that Bhagavan was present in all beings. How could a servant accept service from his master!

Sri Aurobindo wrote about Nag Mahashaya thus: 'There are men like Nag Mahashaya (among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples) in whom spiritual experience creates more and more humility.'<sup>7</sup> Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would have

been most pleased that his prescription of ‘being humbler than a blade of grass and more patient and forbearing than a tree, to take no honour to oneself and to give honour to all’<sup>8</sup> was followed by Nag Mahashaya with perfection.

### Purity

The Bhagavadgita states: ‘This door of hell, which is the destroyer of the self, is of three kinds: passion, anger, and greed. Therefore, one should forsake these three.’<sup>9</sup> Nag Mahashaya knew this well. In order to avoid the snares of lust, he would sit on the branch of a tree at night to avoid the company of his first wife. She died suddenly, but Nag Mahashaya’s father insisted upon his marrying again. Nag Mahashaya’s second wife, Sharat Kamini, proved to be an immaculate companion in his spiritual journey. He advised her that love on the physical dimension was ephemeral, that the slightest attachment to the body would endure for several births. Wise were those who would view the body as no more than a cage of flesh and bones and seek refuge in the Divine Mother.

Nag Mahashaya could not tolerate worldly discussions and left the place if anyone started such a conversation. Or he would change the topic and bring it back to spiritual matters. He had very little body consciousness and this was due to years of practising the habit of not thinking about the usual comforts and urges that the body demands. The body is impure but God, who dwells in it, is pure. Hence he constantly thought about God letting the body take care of itself. He was strict even regarding food. Besides eating frugally, he also never used any salt or sugar in it. His clothes were plain and he wore only a dhoti and a cotton chadar and had stopped wearing shoes. Girish Ghosh used to say: ‘Nag Mahashaya has knocked on the head of his rascal ego so severely that it cannot raise its hood anymore.’<sup>10</sup>

Swami Vivekananda says that the best definition of bhakti is given by the king of bhaktas, Prahlada: ‘That deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of the senses—as I keep meditating on Thee—may not that love slip away from my heart!’<sup>11</sup> This love is for none other than Ishvara. I would not be presumptuous in saying that Prahlada himself would be ecstatic in crowning Nag Mahashaya as a ‘king of lovers’. One can scarcely believe that such a person ever lived on earth. And it will be even harder to imagine who Nag Mahashaya’s loving teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, truly was and is. Let me conclude with the last lines of a poem titled ‘Sri Ramakrishna’:

Lead us to the Goal, abide in the soul,  
Compassion’s deputy!  
Be, O Love’s Star, no cloud can mar,  
Our beacon everlastingly.<sup>12</sup>



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# *Path to an Ideal Society*

Jashobanta Roy

**T**HE WORLD IS GOING through a state of turmoil because of people's narrowness, superstitions, bigotry, corruption, and obsession with ethnic superiority. There is also confusion regarding the various ideals and ideas to be adopted and lived by. In this state of affairs, when everything seems to be falling apart, the superb principles preached by Swami Vivekananda are like a shining light dispelling the darkness around. His message is the Vedanta philosophy made practical.

## ***Practical Vedanta***

The object of Vivekananda's 'practical Vedanta' was to make the philosophically sophisticated doctrines of Advaita Vedanta simple, for the common person's understanding. He wanted to use this philosophy as a tool for reconciling the ideal with the real in the world. He knew that Vedanta had presented rational ideas about human freedom, but he also knew that they need to be realized. This, Vivekananda felt, would

fundamentally restructure society on a spiritual basis; only then could humankind realize their divine essence.

Vivekananda's teachings rest on two key concepts: (i) cultivation of fearlessness and freedom through the awakening of one's inner spirituality, and (ii) realization of the oneness of all beings despite their apparent multiplicity. These two concepts have their basis in unselfish work. Individuals will have to transcend their limited individualities by their own spiritual powers and become universal. When people grow spiritually and manifest their divine dimension, they become capable of expressing themselves through love and compassion, through humanistic impulses towards other human beings and animals. This spiritual growth is required for the overall growth of society. In short, it can be said that spirituality is the need of the age all over the world.

Selfishness is the root cause of all the evils found in society. This selfishness gives rise to greed, which leads to exploitation. Thus the poor

are exploited by the rich, the illiterate by the learned, and the physically weak by the strong. Unselfishness eradicates this root of evil. All divisiveness would be conquered by love, which is an expression of oneness. And Vedanta preaches oneness. It is the power of love that prompts us to moral actions universally accepted and conducive to social welfare. Actions should be universalized because all human beings are essentially universal. Vivekananda laid emphasis on universal brotherhood and the equality of all.

This is also the reason why Vivekananda raised his voice against privileges—individual and group—which he called the bane of human life. ‘The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedanta; that between two nations one is superior and other inferior has no meaning whatsoever.’<sup>1</sup> He expressed his dissatisfaction over the fact that in the country in which Vedanta philosophy originated, there was so much privilege regarding wealth, birth, education, race, and even spirituality. True religion can only exist when privileges have been given up. Vivekananda proclaimed: ‘No privilege for any one, equal chances for all; the days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are gone’ (3.246). In his ideal of society all beings are equal.

Vivekananda laid emphasis on two main points for an ideal society: (i) the need for equal rights for all, and (ii) the need for a social environment that would safeguard human development. The real nature of an individual, according to Vedanta, is its universal dimension, which is difficult to access due to our selfishness and narrowness. As this selfishness and narrowness is attenuated through love and service, there is a corresponding development of the personality as well as a well-conducted and well-regulated social life. Vivekananda conceived of reconstructing society in such a way that each and every person would have the

opportunity to grow into universality. He wanted this central message of Vedanta to be taken to all sections of society, particularly to the weak and the oppressed. He firmly believed this was the most effective method of waking them up for the regeneration of India and the world. As he put it: ‘Our poor people, those downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are. Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect for caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and infinite capacity of all to become great and good’ (3.193).

### **Spiritual Unity**

Spiritual unity, as Vivekananda proclaimed, is the ultimate ground of all divinity. It is also the goal of all human knowledge and experience—whether ethical, scientific, religious, or metaphysical. He said: ‘If you go below the surface, you find that Unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough, all will be seen as only variations of the One, and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion’ (2.153).

This is the only common ground where today’s racial, social, economic, political, and cultural differences can melt away. This spiritual unification of the world was one of Vivekananda’s greatest dreams. He said: ‘The motive power of the whole universe, in whatever way it manifests itself, is that one wonderful thing, unselfishness, renunciation, love, the real, the only living force in existence’ (2.354). He was firmly convinced that ‘God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. “Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed”’ (7.247).

*(Continued on page 203)*

# Swami Vivekananda as a Social Scientist

Dr Biswaranjan Chattopadhyay

A GROUP OF PEOPLE related to each other is called a society. But as societies are becoming more complex, relationships are getting fragile, distant, and plastic. One of the crises humankind is facing is the difficulty in forming and holding on to firm relationships, which is threatening civilization. We are unable to properly connect with our own people. We are habituated to living a cocooned individual existence, shut off from the world, and being immersed in our own selfish thoughts. At heart, we have all become opportunists in a grossly materialistic world. We judge others by what benefit we can derive from them. We also judge an action by its utility. Our desires are varied, our wants are endless, and hence, the more we get, the more we want. In this steady march towards fragmentation we have no time to look inwards.

## **Relevance of Swamiji in the Modern World**

The relevance of Swami Vivekananda today is, above all, that he teaches us to look inwards and solve our own problems. The rediscovery of his teachings is urgently necessary. To label him merely as a religious leader is an injustice to his profound sense of practicality and penetrating knowledge of human nature. Like a scientist he dissected the malady of modern civilization and, what is more, he offered a very viable solution in his own unique way. The question, often uppermost in the minds of sceptics, is whether these great personalities have been able to change the world for the better. The answer is apparently negative. But the positive thing is that they have

done their duty to perfection and, as such, set their lives as examples to follow. Therefore, these great people teach us to do our bit for the betterment of society as well as for our individual development. The world as a whole will remain almost the same, with its balance of good and evil. Vivekananda offers a very effective analogy: the world is like a dog's curly tail, try however you may, you cannot make it straight.

The short but meaningful life of Vivekananda was a quest for freedom from all kinds of bondages. The crises of relationships in a society are brought about by a lack of freedom. We neither want freedom for ourselves nor do we want to grant freedom to others. We become so possessive in any relationship that we forget to leave a breathing space, foolishly making ourselves slaves to our own emotions. True love, according to Vivekananda, makes us unattached, because a person who truly loves feels totally free and yet identified with others. Vivekananda derived his ideas from Advaita Vedanta and propagated two of its basic tenets: '*Tat tvam-asi*; Thou art That', and the oneness of existence. To feel oneness one has to give up selfish desires and the false sense of individuality, make the heart expansive, and connect with the whole world on all levels. To feel one with the universe is the highest spiritual attainment. This was taught to Vivekananda very forcefully by Sri Ramakrishna, his guru. When a person feels one with the universe, he or she attains moksha, freedom, as taught in Vedanta.

Vivekananda said freedom is the first condition of growth, and this is valid for the growth

of an individual as well as of any relationship. We often see that children without being given a minimum amount of freedom are socially, intellectually, and emotionally stunted. Even youths who do not have a proper understanding of the philosophy of freedom take it as a licence to do whatever they want and often land themselves in many a predicament. Vivekananda's idea of freedom does not, however, imply that everyone is allowed to do whatever he or she likes. Real freedom comes out of non-attachment, unselfishness, purity of mind, and an intense concentration on an ideal.

Vivekananda is, perhaps, the only religious leader who declared: 'The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.'<sup>1</sup> He emphasized that every person is potentially divine and religion is nothing but the manifestation of that Divinity already within. According to Vivekananda, two basic qualities are indispensable for the proper development of an individual: fearlessness and practicality. He asserts that the youth can understand the Bhagavadgita better when they are strong and feel strength in every act and thought. He declared that the physically and mentally weak are incapable of attaining spiritual realization. Therefore, unless one is fit and strong, one will not be able to understand the essential and supreme teachings of the Gita. Secondly, one must be very logical and practical. Vivekananda never encouraged us to believe in anything illogical. It is well known that he even tested Sri Ramakrishna before accepting his teachings.

### **Message for the Youth**

All Vivekananda wanted from the people, especially the youth, was enthusiasm. People should be full of life and energy to make a difference in

the world. A long life of performing unselfish work is like a brick wall that stands for a long time. Vivekananda interprets karma yoga as intense activity with intense concentration. All of us work, but most of us do not know the secret of work. He says: 'Karma-Yoga explains this secret and teaches where and how to work, how to employ to the greatest advantage the largest part of our energies in the work that is before us' (2.392). Yoga as related to karma is, therefore, concentration of the mind while engaged in work, which must be done in a spirit of service. Without concentration no real achievement is possible. Vivekananda elaborates: 'Fill yourselves with the ideal; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of the thought. If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent' (2.302). The following teaching found in the Gita is often misinterpreted as working without any goal or idea of success: 'Your right is to action alone, never for the results. Do not become the agent of the results of action. May you not have any inclination for inaction.'<sup>2</sup> This teaching means to work for an ideal without any sense of attachment to reward. Too much attachment breeds selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and detrimental competitiveness. The ideal before Arjuna in the Mahabharata was the eradication of evil in the form of the Kauravas; Sri Krishna in the Gita inspired and persuaded him to fight without hesitation or attachment for the establishment of dharma.

Looking at Indian society, Vivekananda rightly pointed out that the two biggest problems in India were subjugation of women and grinding poverty. Vivekananda's commentary, made more than hundred years ago, holds true even today. Nobody needs to be told about the rampant instances of violence against women, in spite of the clamouring of almost all the political



parties about the empowerment of the female gender. Vivekananda's solution in this regard was very simple and effective: educate women and they will be able to solve their own problems. He believed women epitomize shakti, power, and unless and until India learns to respect that power, the country's real progress will remain a dream. When he went to the US, he was deeply impressed by the contemporary social system there that ensured liberty and respect for women. He exclaimed in a letter: 'Oh! how free they are! It is they who control social and civic duties' (5.25). This is how he summed up: 'Asia laid the germs of civilization, Europe developed man, and America is developing the women and the masses' (5.22). Hence, along with the emancipation or empowerment of women, the development of the masses is also urgently needed. The old form of society, which entailed exploitation of the so-called lower castes by the so-called higher castes, has now been replaced with or accompanied by a new form of caste system: the economic status of a person. As that system had to go, the present system also has to go, because society in the future will have to be based on the divinity of humankind and the oneness of existence.

This is the reason why Vivekananda was never tired of telling us that the social development of a nation depends not merely upon its material progress but also upon the mental and spiritual uplift of its people. Indeed, he wanted to harmonize rationality and spirituality. It is unfortunate that today's youths are in most cases steeped in the wrong ideal: how to make more money. They are not to blame, because their elders are inculcating these wrong ideals in them from childhood. People never bother to think whether money can buy happiness or what we call peace of mind. Happiness or mental peace ultimately depends on the



mind, which can make 'Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.'<sup>3</sup> Vivekananda repeatedly reminds us to take care of our minds, learn the art of concentration as well as non-attachment and be pure and practical. Furthermore, according to him, 'expansion is life and contraction is death.'<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we have to expand the vistas of our knowledge and experience, connect with people and societies, and thereby enable our minds to cope with all the vagaries of life. This way we can conquer self-centredness and make the world a better place.



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# Yoga Therapy of Compassion

Pravrajika Brahmaprana

(Continued from the December 2013 issue)

SELFLESS SERVICE, serving others by trying to love them as one's Self, is the first act of opening the gift of compassion. It starts as compassion in action. If we can keep the highest Vedanta dicta in mind, we will be able to ascend the ladder of love—from the feeling *compassion* for others to the feeling of *oneness with* others. Karma yoga, when properly performed, is actually jnana yoga, because in trying to see and serve others as divine, we ultimately realize that all the time we were really serving our own divine Self.

## From Compassion to Oneness

Initially we aspire to *be* compassionate, then to *become* compassion itself. How? The secret is to infuse our actions with our aspiration, our ideal. If our aspiration is to experience divine love, we take the help of a symbol that best represents divine love—our indwelling Chosen Ideal—and try to visualize and suffuse our actions with its love alone. For example, we may practise *shanta*, a peaceful love, such as a child demonstrates when it turns to its father for all wants. Or perhaps *dasya*, the love that inspires one to serve, dominating all other feelings, can be our path to compassionate love. *Vatsalya*, the motherly love that looks upon God as a child without any element of fear, naturally evokes compassion from within when we project that love upon others. *Sakhya*, the love of friends or equals, erases all fear or shame from our demonstrations of affectionate service. And lastly *madhura*, the intimate love of the lover for the Beloved, expresses perfect oneness when

serving the object of one's love. Of this love Swami Vivekananda stated: 'The highest love is the love that is sexless, for it is perfect unity that is expressed in the highest love. It is therefore only in spirit that union is possible.'<sup>28</sup> If we can take at least one of these relationships and superimpose it upon our Self, which dwells within ourselves and also within others, there is no end to our experience of compassion. All these relationships with the personal God are attempts to experience divine love, for the lover never claims to love, as Christ himself testified: 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.'<sup>29</sup>

The strength of karma yoga is that by doing, by performing an action with compassion—with the help of God's love, as it were—the pure motive of this aspiring divine love penetrates deep into our body and mind. In this way, we become transformed by the pure motive force fuelling our actions. Therefore, when we put compassion into action through genuine selfless service, serving the Self in others without ego, we return to our source, which is the one Self in all. And that abode is *ananda*, loving Consciousness.

The ramifications of selfless service are deep and vast. The *Isha Upanishad* is uncompromising when it states that the Self, 'is one'.<sup>30</sup> 'There is no multiplicity whatsoever.'<sup>31</sup> In creation, the world of multiplicity, 'the Self indeed is all this'<sup>32</sup>; 'the Self is everywhere.'<sup>33</sup> The unity of existence is a radical philosophy, a radical religion, an outrageous truth. It means that

each being is not just a *part* of the reality but the *whole* of the infinite Reality. The whole universe is but a speck in the ocean of being, which each of us is. By approaching this, even meagrely through simple acts of selfless service, no wonder we feel joy. How much more would be our joy, then, if we could realize that in serving others we are actually worshipping the whole of Reality! That is why service, no matter how secular or sacred it begins, is a fail-proof prescription for well-being. It can bring us to the brink of Bliss itself because it is a path to Truth. And no matter where we are on the path, even if we have only learned to serve others philanthropically, we can still feel a palpable happiness because, whether we know it or not, we are approaching the orbit of the blissful Self and can feel the radiance of that light.

### **The Living God**

The practice of love and compassion as service is karma yoga, the path of action. Swami Vivekananda delineated three stages of this yoga: (i) work and worship, (ii) work as worship, (iii) and work is worship. In the stage of work *and* worship, we keep the two actions separate. We feel that service is an outward activity, doing good to others in the world; whereas worship is an inward activity, doing good to oneself in a temple or church. In the stage of work *as* worship, we grow in tune with Swami Vivekananda's ideal of service in daily life. We attempt to de-compartmentalize the secular and the sacred and try to see the living God in those served. We are vigilant about our motive and self-interest. Finally, in the stage when work *is* worship, we reach Swami Vivekananda's culmination of service: seeing Brahman everywhere as the living spirit, when we automatically cherish others as the living God. We lose our sense of the small self by pulling off the

mask of 'other'. Instead, we see others as manifestations of Divinity—the same Divinity that dwells within our self.

This final stage is bliss-filled *seva*, service, because we actually feel that we are serving our Beloved in the form of the other, which is just another manifestation of our own Self. This method of yoga shifts our centre of focus from the giver to the receiver, our Beloved. At last we have reached the ultimate goal, which surpasses empathy; we feel fulfilled and the recipient feels elevated. What does this look like?

In 1949 while Swami Prabhavananda was on a pilgrimage to India, he met in his family village of Vishnupur an old man who had met Sri Ramakrishna. The old man explained to the swami that when he was a young boy, his sister had married someone near Kamarpukur. So one day both he and his sister travelled by bullock cart to Kamarpukur, stopping first at Haldarpukur. The boy was thirsty and went to a nearby pond where Gadadhar was standing by a tree holding its branch as he observed the young boy. When Gadadhar noticed that the boy could not drink water without a cup, he cupped his hands for him, saying, 'now you drink'. He began talking with the boy and told him to think of him whenever he was in difficulty. Suddenly the boy's sister came running from a distance and snatched the boy away from Gadadhar, who was known at that time as 'the mad Gadai'.

Time passed and the young boy eventually forgot the whole episode. But later in life when he had some troubles, he began to remember 'the mad Gadai'. Sri Ramakrishna would then appear before him, and magically his problems would be solved. Only afterwards did the villager learn that Sri Ramakrishna and 'the mad Gadai' were one and the same.

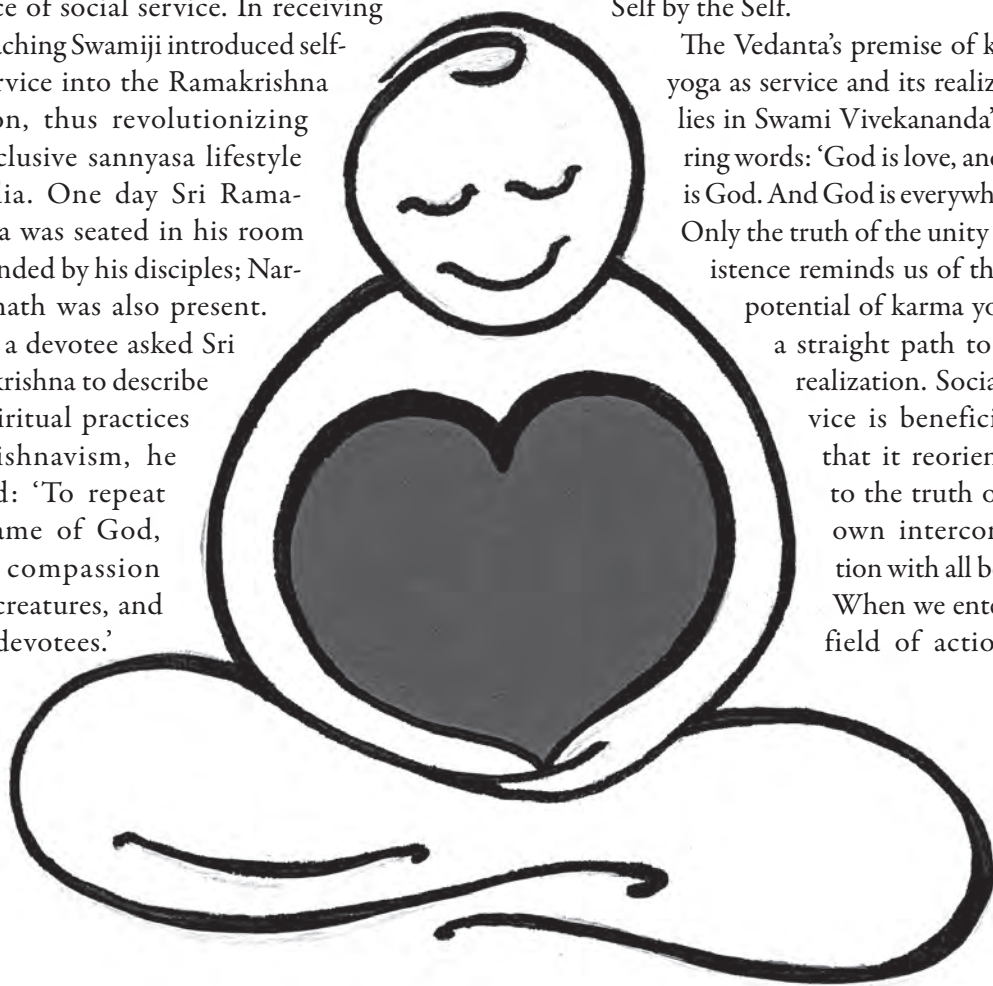
By the time Swami Prabhavananda met the

old villager, he saw that he spent his days sitting under a tree, chanting 'Jai Sri Ramakrishna' in ecstasy. What a paramount example of how karma yoga, selfless action, can elevate the receiver! Though admittedly we can never have the capacity to serve others with the same love as an avatara, nevertheless the simple act of bestowing a drink of water—with even an aspiration for divine love—can certainly leave a lasting impression on an unknowing recipient. Such is the power of the practice of divine love through acts of love and compassion.

It was Sri Ramakrishna who taught Swami Vivekananda how Satchidananda, the underlying unity of all existence, translates into the practice of social service. In receiving this teaching Swamiji introduced selfless service into the Ramakrishna Mission, thus revolutionizing the reclusive sannyasa lifestyle in India. One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room surrounded by his disciples; Narendranath was also present. When a devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna to describe the spiritual practices of Vaishnavism, he replied: 'To repeat the name of God, show compassion to all creatures, and serve devotees.'

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna repeated 'compassion to all creatures' and entered into samadhi. On returning to semi-consciousness he muttered: 'Compassion for creatures! Who are you to show compassion to others? Not compassion for man, but service to him as the manifestation of God.' Though there were many in the room who heard these words, only Narendranath realized their full import and thus said, as he stepped outside the Master's room: 'I will proclaim this wonderful truth to the world!'<sup>34</sup> The future Vivekananda understood that Sri Ramakrishna's message of karma yoga was to see God in every being and thus serve others, not as philanthropy but as worship of the Self by the Self.

The Vedanta's premise of karma yoga as service and its realization lies in Swami Vivekananda's stirring words: 'God is love, and love is God. And God is everywhere.'<sup>35</sup> Only the truth of the unity of existence reminds us of the full potential of karma yoga as a straight path to God realization. Social service is beneficial in that it reorients us to the truth of our own interconnection with all beings. When we enter the field of action, as






opposed to mere sedentary thought, our acts of service begin to drive that truth home, by physically affirming it through our concrete actions. Therefore, when social service becomes transmuted into selfless service, the practice of karma yoga purifies and transforms our meritorious acts into acts of divine love.

We can start our service to others with acts of forgiveness, forbearance, ahimsa, loving kindness, and volunteer service. Then, as our ego ripens and we expand our sense of self to include the whole world, we are able to hone the quality of our work, not by working feverishly but by working devotedly. Our vision opens up and we see all creation, all beings, residing within our heart, the abode of God, love incarnate. ‘When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?’<sup>36</sup> The rishi Yajnavalkya declared to King Janaka, whose path of yoga was far from that of a recluse: ‘You have attained “that” which is free from fear, O Janaka.’<sup>37</sup> This revelation is the wisdom of compassion. Waking up means to assimilate this Truth, think about it, practise it, and experience it *by living it through the field of action*.

What are the challenges? How can we truly serve so that we feel fulfilled and the recipient of our actions feels elevated? Without meditation we forget who we are working for and our service easily slips into the hands of the ego. When karma yoga becomes just karma, it ceases to be transformative. Therefore, we must remain vigilant and practise mindfulness in action. Swami Vivekananda reminds us again and again that we have no right to expect anything in return for our service:

When you give something to a man and expect nothing—do not even expect the man to

be grateful—his ingratitude will not tell upon you, because you never expected anything, never thought you had any right to anything in the way of a return. You gave him what he deserved; his own Karma got it for him; your Karma made you the carrier thereof. Why should you be proud of having given away something? You are the porter that carried the money or other kind of gift, and the world deserved it by its own Karma. Where is then the reason for pride in you?<sup>38</sup>

The yoga of selfless service is really a type of therapy because it bestows on us compassion and joy. How? By serving others as our Self this yoga leads us on the non-dual path back to our true abode: the light of loving Consciousness within. And this loving Consciousness is a vast and unending experience of expansion and bliss that can elevate one to the state of a bodhisattva. In the words of the sage Swami Vivekananda, one such selfless exemplar of compassion: ‘May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship’ (5.137). 

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# Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: Two Teachings or One?

Arpita Mitra

(Continued from the previous issue)

MOVING ON TO Sri Ramakrishna, let us review the perspective held by most scholars. Neeval writes: 'While Sri Ramakrishna was an intelligent person capable of subtle speculation, his dialogues clearly reveal him to have been a mystic and *bhakta* who disparaged the power of the intellect, denied the possibility and necessity of rational understanding of the Divine, and held in small honor those who were preoccupied with philosophical and theological considerations.'<sup>42</sup> This statement is representative of the view that most scholars hold about the Master. Let us now examine the validity of such claims.

Sri Ramakrishna actually spoke of knowledge in three distinct senses: (i) Knowledge, as in *jnana*; (ii) knowledge and reason as epistemological faculties, and (iii) knowledge and reasoning, as in book-learning, argumentation, discussion, debate, and talking.

The first concept encompasses several related precepts: God exists, God alone is Real, and the world of the senses is transitory—a reasoning that is called 'discernment'; 'to know one's own Self'<sup>43</sup> is knowledge; 'to know many things is *ajnana*, ignorance, to know one thing is *jnana*, Knowledge' (598–9); 'God has become everything' (105); 'I and mine', that is, a sense of one who possesses it, is ignorance, knowledge is to know that everything belongs to the Lord; the sense of 'I am the doer' is ignorance, that 'God is the real doer and I am the instrument' (98) is knowledge.

Master: 'One cannot realize Truth by futile arguments and reasoning.

Pratap: Shouldn't we reason any more then?

Master: I am asking you not to indulge in futile reasoning. But reason, by all means, about the Real and the unreal, about what is permanent and what is transitory. You must reason when you are overcome by lust, anger, or grief.

Shashadhar: That is different. It is called reasoning based on discrimination.

Master: Yes, discrimination between the Real and the unreal (496).

On another occasion a Brahmo devotee asked: 'How can one realize God?' The Master replied: 'By directing your love to Him and constantly reasoning that God alone is real and the world illusory' (220).

Thus, the assertion that Sri Ramakrishna's teachings were distinct from the path of *jnana* is an ill-founded one. *Bhakti* without discerning reasoning achieves little; without renunciation and discernment all spiritual austerities lead to naught, just as a container with holes does not retain water.

All paths lead to the same Truth, and the two paths of knowledge and love may even be joined: 'The path of knowledge leads to Truth, as does the path that combines knowledge and love. The path of love, too, leads to this goal' (104).

About his denial of 'the possibility and necessity of rational understanding of the Divine', we come to the second sense in which Sri

Ramakrishna used words such as ‘knowledge’ and ‘reason’—in the sense of epistemological faculties. God is beyond knowledge and ignorance in the sense in which we ordinarily understand these terms (101, 102–3, 106), but Sri Ramakrishna adds a caveat:

Sadhaka: Is it possible to see God?

Master: He is unknowable by the mind engrossed in worldliness. One cannot attain God if one has even a trace of attachment to ‘woman and gold’. But He is knowable by the pure mind and the pure intelligence—the mind and intelligence that have not the slightest trace of attachment. Pure Mind, Pure Intelligence, Pure Atman, are one and the same thing (524).

As long as a man analyses with the mind, he cannot reach the Absolute. As long as you reason with your mind, you have no way of getting rid of the universe and the objects of the senses—form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. When reasoning stops, you attain the Knowledge of Brahman. Atman cannot be realized through this mind; Atman is realized through Atman alone. Pure Mind, Pure Buddhi, Pure Atman—all these are one and the same (802).

I have observed that a man acquires one kind of knowledge about God through reasoning and another kind through meditation; but he acquires a third kind of Knowledge about God when God reveals Himself to him, His devotee (734).

Next, in the third sense of the term ‘reasoning’, Sri Ramakrishna did repeatedly disparage reasoning, argumentation, discussion, futile debate about spiritual matters, because spirituality is a matter of *realization* and *practice*—no amount of book-learning can bring the knowledge of God, and no amount of dry discussion without sadhana and first-hand experience can have the final word about God. In this sense, he used the term *in opposition* to sadhana and the realization that sadhana leads to. And, in this

sense, innumerable times did Swamiji too disparage futile talking devoid of practice: ‘This is the watchword of the Vedanta—realise religion, no talking will do.’<sup>44</sup>

Without taking the complexity of the categories into account, one is likely to arrive at only a partial understanding of Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude towards knowledge and reason at best, or be left in utter confusion at worst.

To conclude this section, it may be reiterated that the distinctions scholars tend to make between jnana, bhakti, or karma are really superficial. The following passage from Swami Premananda’s reminiscences is particularly incisive:

Each avatar represented a particular ideal. It is not that other ideals were absent in them. They were the embodiments of all ideals, but they publicly gave expression to a particular one, according to the need of the people of their time. Chaitanya was an Incarnation of divine love. He was love crystallized. So also Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge, and Buddha of renunciation. Krishna was the embodiment of selfless work, and he synthesized all religions and philosophies. He demonstrated that karma, jnana, bhakti, and yoga are all components of the great sadhana. To prove this, he formed his life on the basis of selfless action. Selfless action purifies the heart, and in the pure heart comes renunciation. Buddha came with this renunciation. He did nothing for himself, not even for his own salvation. Everything he did was for the good of others, for suffering humanity. After renunciation comes knowledge. Shankara brought this knowledge. And after knowledge comes love, so Chaitanya came to distribute this love to all. People thought that all these paths were contradictory. In this present age Sri Ramakrishna removed all these contradictions and brought a harmony of all paths of yoga and of all religions.<sup>45</sup>

### **Is Karma Yoga a Direct and Independent Means to Moksha?**

There are many important issues that Anantanand Rambachan raises in his article on Swamiji's karma yoga. However, for our present purpose, we restrict ourselves to only the pertinent ones. Rambachan continuously emphasizes Swamiji's insistence on the directness and independence of each of the yogas as a path to liberation or knowledge of the Self. On the basis of such assertions, in later works, scholars like Amiya Sen conclude Swamiji's 'view that *karma yoga* could be entirely unrelated to the paths of *gyan* or *bhakti*, [does not occur] in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna,'<sup>46</sup> and is, therefore, a point of divergence.

First of all, while on the one hand it is true that Swamiji once claimed the directness and independence of each yoga; on the other, he often asserted that none of the yogas could be really looked upon as hermetically separate:

The grandest idea in the religion of the Vedanta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths; and these paths I have generalised into four, viz. those of work, love, psychology, and knowledge. But you must, at the same time, remember that these divisions are not very marked and quite exclusive of each other. Each blends into the other. But according to the type which prevails, we name the divisions. ... These divisions are made in accordance with the type or the tendency that may be seen to prevail in a man. We have found that, in the end, all these four paths converge and become one. All religions and all methods of work and worship lead us to one and the same goal.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, there have been numerous other instances where he has qualified that good or non-attached actions lead to moksha indirectly, only serving as a means for self-purification: 'Bhakti is indirectly helped by all good works. Good

thoughts and good works create less differentiation than bad ones; so indirectly they lead to freedom' (7.38). Again, we can consider a passage which Rambachan himself cites, but we extend it a bit here: 'Can Jiva-seva (service to beings) alone give Mukti? Jiva-seva can give Mukti not directly but indirectly, through the purification of the mind. But if you wish to do a thing properly, you must, for the time being, think that that is all-sufficient. The danger in any sect is want of zeal. There must be constancy (Nishtha), or there will be no growth. At present it has become necessary to lay stress on Karma' (5.325).

We shall come to the significance of the last sentence later. For the time being it is clear that, depending on the context, Swamiji highlights the interconnectedness of all the yogas to emphasize the unity of the purpose. He also says that rarely do qualities exist in unmixed forms—lest one thinks that qualities like knowledge or love are and can exist hermetically separate. Furthermore, for him personally, the ideal was always the development of a harmonious personality. At other times he emphasizes the independence of each path in order to underscore the need to practise each path rigorously instead of dilly-dallying with several: 'Our various Yogas do not conflict with each other; each of them leads us to the same goal and makes us perfect; only each has to be strenuously practised' (1.92). Sri Ramakrishna himself emphasized the need to follow rigorously whichever path one chooses.

Swamiji explains further: 'No one method can suit all. These different methods are not steps necessary to be taken one after another. Ceremonials are the lowest form; next God external, and after that God internal. In some cases gradation may be needed, but in many only one way is required. It would be the height of folly to say to everyone, "You must pass through Karma and Bhakti before you reach Jnana"' (7.60).



Next, according to Rambachan, it was probably to emphasize the distinction between karma yoga and bhakti yoga that Vivekananda insisted that detachment is also possible for one who does not accept a personal God.<sup>48</sup> If we examine this closely, we see that Swamiji was merely giving an option, as he gave the other option too:

Here are the two ways of giving up all attachment. The one is for those who do not believe in God, or in any outside help. They are left to their own devices; they have simply to work with their own will, with the powers of their mind and discrimination, saying, 'I must be non-attached'. For those who believe in God there is another way, which is much less difficult. They give up the fruits of work unto the Lord; they work and are never attached to the results. Whatever they see, feel, hear, or do, is for Him.<sup>49</sup>

Swamiji actually maintains his preference for God-centred acts of service, while not discounting the value of compassion independent of belief in God either. When asked, 'What should be our motive in work—compassion, or any other motive?' He responded, 'Doing good to others out of compassion is good, but the Seva (service) of all beings in the spirit of the Lord is better' (5.325).

Regarding karma and jnana Rambachan writes: 'In order to further strengthen his claims for *karmayoga* as a direct and independent path to *jnana*, Vivekananda distinguishes it—one supposes from *jnanyoga*—by describing it as being free from all doctrines and dogma.'<sup>50</sup> We cannot be sure if in describing karma yoga thus, Swamiji was guided by such intentions. Given the general line of Swamiji's thought and teachings, what he must have meant by 'doctrines and dogmas' here is what he usually meant by these terms—rigid theories, even book-learning, as opposed to realization and practice. 'Religion

is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation, it is being and becoming, it is realisation.'<sup>51</sup> Or for instance: 'This is one great idea to learn and to hold on to, this idea of realisation ... religion is not in books and temples. It is an actual perception. Only the man who has actually perceived God and soul has religion' (2.163).

### **Karma and Its Functions**

According to Rambachan, there is no 'single discussion in the lectures and writings of Vivekananda where one can turn to find a clear and comprehensive statement of his understanding of *karmayoga*. What exactly constitutes *karmayoga* is, therefore, not obvious and apparent. ... As we search for his central definition of *karmayoga*, the concept which emerges most often, therefore, is the idea of unselfish action.'<sup>52</sup> However, Swamiji did delineate what he meant by karma yoga. He states it is that which makes a science of work; 'how best to utilise all the workings of this world' to our spiritual advantage, the 'knowledge of the secret of work.'<sup>53</sup> It is 'a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works' (1.111). Now, what is work, or karma? He defined that as well: 'Any work, any action, any thought that produces an effect is called a Karma' (1.94). He used the word 'karma' in three senses: (i) any activity like talking, listening, breathing, or walking (1.29) or any work (1.27): 'Every mental and physical blow that is given to the soul, by which, as it were, fire is struck from it, and by which its own power and knowledge are discovered, is Karma, this word being used in its widest sense' (1.29); (ii) householders' duties (1.46); and (iii) rituals (1.72).

For Swamiji, karma had several functions:

(i) Work is inescapable, all of us are bound to do at least a fixed quantum of work. So, we should use work to our spiritual advantage (1.100).

(ii) Work is meant to exhaust the share of enjoyment and suffering that we must experience in this world before we are saturated and turn to higher things (1.40; 2.171).

(iii) The world and working in this world are meant for the training of the mind, it is a 'moral gymnasium' to make us 'stronger and stronger spiritually' (1.80), so that knowledge about the real nature of the world can be acquired through experience, which helps us in the path of attaining knowledge of the Self (1.57, 98-9).

(iv) Through work, non-attachment and

selflessness can be cultivated thereby purifying the mind, selflessness and a pure mind being the pre-condition for God-realization (1.76, 84-5).

Sri Ramakrishna used the word 'karma' exactly in the three senses in which Swamiji used it: (i) any activity, such as breathing, even prayer, and meditation; (ii) householders' duties; and (iii) rituals. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'All, without exception, perform work. Even to chant the name and glories of God is work, as is the meditation of the non-dualist on "I am He". Breathing is also an activity. There is no way of renouncing work



all together. So do your work, but surrender the result to God.’<sup>54</sup> He also says: ‘Do your [worldly] duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands’ (138). ‘Karmayoga is very hard indeed. In the Kaliyuga it is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the scriptures’ (143).

Using the word in the first sense, the Master says it is not possible to renounce activity altogether, a person’s very nature will make one work, therefore, one should try to work with non-attachment to the result, thereby using work to one’s spiritual advantage (452). When once Girish Ghosh expressed the desire to give up work, the Master said: ‘No, work is good. When the ground is well-cultivated and cleared of stones and pebbles, whatever you plant will grow. But one should work without any personal motive’ (679). Sri Ramakrishna actually pointed out the importance of karma even in spiritual life: ‘It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. This is a kind of discipline. But one must finish it speedily’ (209). Once a devotee asked: ‘Sir, why has God put us in the world?’ To which the Master replied:

The world is the field of action. Through action one acquires knowledge. The guru instructs the disciples to perform certain work and refrain from others. Again, he advises the pupil to perform action without desiring the result. The impurity of the mind is destroyed through the performance of duty. It is like getting rid of a disease by means of medicine, under the instruction of a competent physician.

Why doesn’t God free us from the world? Ah, He will free us when the disease is cured. He will liberate us from the world when we are through with the enjoyment of ‘women and gold’ (185).

In another situation, Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘Nothing can be achieved except in its proper time. Some persons must pass through many experiences and perform many worldly duties

before they can turn their attention to God. ... If an abscess is lanced before it is soft, the result is not good; the surgeon makes the opening when it is soft and has come to a head (162). ‘Most people don’t feel any longing for God unless they have once passed through the experience of wealth, name, fame, creature comforts, and the like, that is to say, unless they have seen through these enjoyments’ (216).

In this respect the similarities between the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji are too evident to be elaborated. Therefore, assertions such as Sri Ramakrishna had a poor work ethic or that his teachings represented a break from the path of karma do not hold good. In fact, the claims that Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings symbolized withdrawal from jnana and karma are nullified by a single statement of his: ‘Think of King Janaka. What courage he had, indeed! He fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of work. He possessed the perfect Knowledge of Brahman and also was devoted to the duties of the world’ (194). It is well known that the Master was fond of referring often to King Janaka.

Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude towards work has evidently been misunderstood by scholars. Swami Premananda writes:

We sometimes find people wasting time by sitting idle in the name of japam and meditation. This is a sign of *tamas* [inertia]. The Master did much work. We saw him working in the garden, and he also swept his room. He could not tolerate work done in a slipshod manner. He himself did everything precisely and gracefully, and he taught us to do the same. ... He did all these things, and yet how inward he was all the time! ... We heard him say many times, ‘Yoga is skill in action.’<sup>55</sup>

Holy Mother had repeatedly highlighted the benefits of work: ‘One should work all the time.



Work keeps fit both body and mind.<sup>56</sup> Once when a woman devotee was lamenting that they hardly got respite from worldly duties to give undivided time to spiritual pursuits, the Holy Mother remarked: 'At the same time, it is essential that one should work. It is through work alone that one may break asunder the bonds of *karma*, only then one is free from desires. One shouldn't be without work even for a single moment' (139). Would scholars call this an upturning of the teachings of the Master? It certainly was not. While knowing that the goal of life is God-realization, one should keep one's mind steady on God and continue to work for the time required. In the case of ordinary persons, work prevents the mind from going astray. It provides a much required discipline.

On another occasion a disciple presented two contending opinions on the importance of work in spiritual life to the Holy Mother and asked for a clarifying resolution. One said that spiritual progress could be attained through work. The other dismissed this opinion and held that the only means of attaining God-realization was meditation. While emphasizing the need of simultaneously engaging in prayer and meditation along with work to develop a mind that can discern between right and wrong, the Holy Mother said in support of the first argument: 'You will work as a matter of course. ... The mind keeps well, when engaged in work. And yet *japa*, meditation, prayer also are specially needed ... that acts as a rudder to a boat.'<sup>57</sup> To the second argument, which said that work is of no avail in spiritual life, she said: 'How did they know, what will be fruitful and what not?' (Ibid.). Thereafter, referring to the case of a particular individual she said: 'How many can make *japa* and meditate for ever? At first one does something. And then like N—one becomes puffed up. Next one loses peace thinking of all worthless things like stones and trees. It is much better to work, than to make

the mind lazy and let it loose. The mind creates trouble whenever it is let loose. It is after noticing all these that my Naren introduced works without motive' (360).

In the second sense in which the word 'karma' is used, we know that the Master says that worldly duties should be performed by all means, but with non-attachment and with the prayer that one day they are lessened to the bare minimum so that one gets more time to contemplate God. Worldly duties also have the function of maintaining the world. Firstly, Sri Ramakrishna reiterated that it is the duty of one who earns, to earn through good means and to spend on good purpose—upkeep of family, but not on luxury, service of the poor and the holy. Swamiji had also listed the duties of the householder and underscored the possibility of realizing one's spiritual potential through the performance of one's immediate duties at hand, illustrated in the examples of the devoted wife and the *vyadha*, butcher, in his *Karma Yoga*. Secondly, for those who are earning through honest means and living in a family devoted to God, Sri Ramakrishna also points out the advantages of calling on God from the position of a householder, which is akin to fighting from a fort, as all needs of sustenance are easily met.

Sri Ramakrishna's advice to householders regarding what they should do varies according to the person he addresses. For instance, he asked Ishan to lessen his involvement in worldly duties and devote more of his mind to God, because he had already performed enough duties.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, we find instances in the *Kathamrita* where he tells some householder devotees that the fruits of their actions were not yet adequately exhausted and that it was not yet time for them to renounce, therefore they should continue with their duties while constantly remembering God. There is a third kind of case, where he exhorts devotees like Nilkantha to continue

with the work they are doing, because God has kept them in this world for some purpose, and that he need not worry as his mind was already turned towards God. 'Your eyes fill with tears when you utter the name of God. ... Divine love has grown in you' (598).

Religion does not give abstract advice to anybody; while keeping the fundamental principles intact, a course of action is suggested for each, taking his or her stage of spiritual development and potential into account. As Swamiji says: 'Every man should take up his own ideal and endeavour to accomplish it. That is a surer way of progress than taking up other men's ideals, which he can never hope to accomplish.'<sup>59</sup> And as Swami Ramakrishnananda observed:

'Religion as Sri Ramakrishna taught it was never vague or dismal. It went to the man where he was and lifted him up. It was not like an eagle, which soars high in the air and calls to the tortoise, "Come up here." Can the tortoise ever hope to rise so high? ... So Sri Ramakrishna in his teaching came down and carried the man up by degrees.'<sup>60</sup> The real meaning of the Master's teachings gets veritably distorted when one considers them detached from their context.

### **The Three Gunas**

According to Rambachan, without any development of argument, Swamiji claims that karma yoga has to do with the understanding of the three *gunas*, qualities, and their employment for



success in activity. However, in his *Karma Yoga* and elsewhere, Swamiji does develop his argument about the three *gunas* quite extensively; this theory is not superfluous in karma yoga, it is in fact very central to it.

Work is a training to awaken, develop, and manifest the potential power lying within. 'You must remember that all work is simply to bring out the power of the mind which is already there, to wake up the soul. The power is inside every man, so is knowledge; the different works are like blows to bring them out, to cause these giants to wake up.'<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, work is meant to facilitate a step-by-step process from inactivity, to activity, to calmness; from bad to good and even beyond.

Before reaching this highest ideal [of non-resistance], man's duty is to resist evil; let him work, let him fight, let him strike straight from the shoulder [rajasic]. Then only, when he has gained the power to resist, will non-resistance be a virtue. ... Inactivity should be avoided by all means. Activity always means resistance. Resist all evils, mental and physical; and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come (1.39–40).

One man does not resist because he is weak, lazy, and cannot, not because he will not [tamasic]; the other man knows that he can strike an irresistible blow if he likes; yet he not only does not strike, but blesses his enemies [sattvic]. The one who from weakness resists not commits a sin, and as such cannot receive any benefit from the non-resistance; while the other would commit a sin by offering resistance (1.38–9).

Swamiji also states: 'In order to be free we have to pass through vice to virtue, and then get rid of both. Tamas is to be conquered by Rajas, both are to be submerged in Sattva; then go beyond the three qualities' (7.46). 'Sattva binds through the search for happiness and knowledge, Rajas binds through desire, Tamas binds through

wrong perception and laziness. Conquer the two lower by Sattva, and then give up all to the Lord and be free' (7.81).

The principle is that one would graduate from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattva* and thereafter move beyond the three *gunas*. The destination beyond the realm of these three—where God is—is reached through *sattva* and one cannot jump from *tamas* to *sattva*. It was especially true in the context of India, where the vast majority of the masses were immersed in *tamas*. This *tamas* often disguised itself as *sattva*, that is, indolence, inactivity, and weakness masquerading as goodness, and Swamiji was poignantly aware of it. A weak and inactive mind cannot perceive God. Without first developing internal strength and self-reliance, any mass spiritual development is difficult in a country, where ignorance, weakness, poverty, hunger, and illness are rampant. The only way to raise the masses from *tamas* to *sattva* is via *rajas*, activity, which would bring out the power within. This is the meaning of the statement we encountered a little while ago: 'At present it has become necessary to lay stress on Karma.' But the ultimate goal is spiritual realization, these are merely necessary steps to the goal.

Sen is evidently wrong in claiming that Swamiji 'held *Rajas* (work and valour) to be by no means inferior to *Sattva* (piety and religious virtue)—a theory that contradicts the traditional ordering of human qualities, endorsed in Ramakrishna. By putting action at least on the same footing as ascetic contemplation, Vivekananda seems to have not only departed from the negative work ethic of his Master but also implicitly suggested a fresh look at traditional (Hindu) value systems.'<sup>62</sup> Firstly, what 'traditional (Hindu) value systems' actually were calls for a separate study, but it can be briefly stated here that an understanding of it has been substantially distorted through the lens of colonial historiography,



which apart from having an agenda of domination, also approached a study of India with its own epistemological opposition between active versus contemplative lives. Secondly, as is clearly evident from the above citations, Swamiji did not hold *rajas* to be on a par with *sattva*. Swamiji's exhortation to his young disciple to follow the path of action—which Sen cites as evidence to support his argument—is not tantamount to a valorization of *rajas*. If it were so, then the Bhagavadgita should be the most rajasic text in the world! He only considered it to be a necessary step to the attainment of *sattva* from the even lower state of *tamas*. In itself, *rajas* had no value for him, unless it helped to attain the higher state of *sattva*. Here, he is very much in keeping with both his guru and traditional Hindu thought.


(To be concluded)

## References

42. 'The Transformation of Sri Ramakrishna', 54.
43. *Gospel*, 98 and 204.
44. *Complete Works*, 2.165.
45. *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*, 109–10.
46. *Explorations in Modern Bengal c.1800-1900*, 105.
47. *Complete Works*, 1.108.
48. See Anantanand Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1995), 68.
49. *Complete Works*, 1.102.
50. *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 69.
51. *Complete Works*, 2.43.
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53. *Complete Works*, 1.99.
54. *Gospel*, 113–4.
55. *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*, 110–11.
56. *In the Company of the Holy Mother*, 127.
57. Her Direct Disciples, *At Holy Mother's Feet: Teachings of Shri Sarada Devi* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1963), 358.
58. See *Gospel*, 613.
59. *Complete Works*, 1.41.
60. *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*, 153.
61. *Complete Works*, 1.31.
62. *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872–1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, 319–20.

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Considering the present sociocultural and political situation, both nationally and globally, the question arises: Can we really have an ideal society as dreamt by Vivekananda? When we observe such a wide gap between the have and the have-nots, developed and developing nations, it becomes difficult to visualize an ideal society. Modern technology has put dreadful weapons of destruction at the disposal of those who have no moral or universal outlook. The spending of trillions for military purposes is awful while billions of people are left without food, shelter, sanitation, health, and access to education and modern technology. Everything is organized instrumentally for the satisfaction of some undefined, intangible need of personal 'security' and individual

fulfilment. Despite all these challenges, we should not lose faith; the world has also gone through greater crises in the past. These present problems are one of the many stages of humankind's journey. We are not here to sit still but to move on. That has been the wonderful capacity and history of humankind. The innate Divinity will not rest, calling on us till we reach the divine voice. Today that voice of Divinity has been embodied as Swami Vivekananda to encourage and inspire us all to reach our real universal nature. 

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# ***Role of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in Human Development***

**Dr Anil Baran Ray and Dr Sukanya Ray**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**S**RI RAMAKRISHNA GAVE Narendra such love as no person could ever give him and ‘there was much reverence with it.’<sup>8</sup> It was no ordinary love. It issued from his perception of Narendra as the embodiment of the divine spirit and his sense of oneness with him. ‘Look! In you is Shiva! In me is Shakti! And these two are One,’<sup>9</sup> he said to Narendra. Sri Ramakrishna loved Narendra no less for his secular accomplishments, remarking: ‘How versatile Narendra is! He is gifted in singing, in playing on instruments and in studies.’<sup>10</sup>

It would be instructive to give a few examples of the intensity of Sri Ramakrishna’s love for Narendra. It was the practice of Narendra to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar on Sundays and holidays. Once he could not come for several days. This made Sri Ramakrishna so restless that he could not sleep at night and went on entreating Baburam—later Swami Premananda—and Ramdayal, another devotee, who stayed with him on that night at Dakshineswar, to this effect: ‘Look here, as I have not seen Narendra for a long time, I feel as if my whole soul is being forcibly wrung like a wet towel. Please ask him to come once and see me. He is a person of pure Sattva, he is Narayana Himself; I cannot have peace of mind if I don’t see him now and then.’<sup>11</sup> Vaikunthanath Sanyal, another devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, found him equally overwhelmed with grief on another occasion and for the similar reason: ‘My heart is being squeezed as it were,

so excruciating is the pain at not seeing him.’<sup>12</sup>

If the gap between one visit and another of Narendra would be longer than his expectation, Sri Ramakrishna would either send someone to Calcutta to fetch Narendra to Dakshineswar or would himself make the trip to Calcutta to see him. As for Narendra, his love for Sri Ramakrishna did not deter him from testing his Master’s purity. Sri Ramakrishna himself said: ‘You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly’ (1.98). And Narendra, averse to accepting anything without testing it, one day put a coin under the bed of Sri Ramakrishna to test his claim that he could not bear the touch of gold or women. And what did he see? He saw that the moment Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed, he stood up with his whole body writhing in pain. Having watched this and having also found on investigation that Sri Ramakrishna could not endure the touch of people of questionable character, Narendra believed that the man was indeed purged of any attachment to lust and gold.

Narendra loved Sri Ramakrishna and accepted in full measure the moral purity of the man, but there were differences on the intellectual plane between the two. Narendra would not give in easily on issues such as image worship and the concept of an avatara. Though as a child he worshipped gods in images, he outgrew such a belief in his youth. The Brahmo Samaj propagated the belief in a formless God with attributes. One day he found Rakhal—later Swami

Brahmananda—also a member of the Brahmo Samaj, bowing before the image of Goddess Kali at Dakshineswar under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna and severely scolded him for going back on his oath at the Brahmo Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna made two profound observations on this disputation about image worship: (i) the paths to God are many and not the same for all and each must be allowed to seek God in his own way, and (ii) if God is infinite, then he is free to assume forms as well. After all, it is logically indefensible to limit the infinitude or the infinite will of God.

While Narendra accepted the theoretical soundness of Sri Ramakrishna's point that the paths to realization could indeed be many, he continued to show reservation on the issue of image worship. To this, Sri Ramakrishna told him that the forms of God were true because he had the experience of seeing them. Narendra dismissed this argument with the observation that what Sri Ramakrishna saw as revelations of God or of his Divine Mother Kali were nothing but hallucinations or mere fancies of his brain—a fact, he claimed, had been proved by psychology. Momentarily heartbroken, Sri Ramakrishna went back to the Divine Mother to ask her the truth and came back with the confirmation that God could indeed be seen and talked to by the pure souls and that the day would come soon when Narendra himself would see this truth. Indeed, in his later years as Swami Vivekananda, he who had once refused to accept Kali as the Divine Mother of the universe candidly confessed to his beloved disciple Nivedita: 'You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother.'<sup>13</sup>

Narendra also detested the avatara theory, the claim that God incarnates on earth, and more particularly the assertion that Sri Ramakrishna was an avatara himself. His point was that God,

as infinity, could not have parts, and that God, who dwells in everything, cannot manifest only through one person. To this, Sri Ramakrishna made the point that God, dwelling in everyone, manifests differently in different persons, and that God could indeed manifest itself most through one person. As the years rolled on and Narendra became Swami Vivekananda, this point of Sri Ramakrishna also made its mark on him.

Finally, Narendra did not accept the truth of Advaita Vedanta as to the unity of jiva and Brahman till Sri Ramakrishna impressed this upon him by his convincing touch. Having read *Ashtavakra Samhita* and other Advaita treatises at the request of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra thought that Advaita philosophy and what the sages wrote on the theory was nothing short of preposterous and that it was absurd in the extreme to think of oneself as God. He went to the length of claiming that the sages who expounded Advaita philosophy must have been insane, to which Sri Ramakrishna, in a message typical of his teaching, remarked: 'You may not accept the view of these seers; but how can you abuse them or limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of Truth and believe in any aspect of His which He reveals to you.'<sup>14</sup> Sri Ramakrishna then touched Narendra, putting him immediately into samadhi. The effect of this touch is best described in the words of Narendra himself: 'The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! ... I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy' (1.96–7).

The above account of Narendra's intellectual struggle shows that he fought every inch of the way before he accepted anything that Sri

Ramakrishna had to say. Sri Ramakrishna undoubtedly stimulated and kindled the spiritual consciousness that was sleeping in Narendra, but only in the face of his great intellectual stubbornness and opposition. Narendra was heavily influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, but his complete acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna as his guru was yet to come. In fact, full acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna came only after Narendra found himself in difficult circumstances, following the sudden death of his father on 25 February 1884.

Narendra passed his BA Examination in January 1884 and enrolled for a three-year law course at Calcutta University when his father died. 'Days of suffering came. From comfort Naren was thrown into direct poverty, at times facing virtual starvation' (1.120). As his mother reminisced: 'Often he would refuse to eat on the plea that he had already eaten at the house of a friend, when the fact was, he did not eat at home for fear of depriving the others of a full meal' (1.121).

In the midst of such gloom and misery with no helping hand around, Narendra had to discontinue his studies and search for a job even before the period of mourning following his father's death was over. To quote from Swamiji's reminiscences of those days: 'Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching noonday sun with an application in hand. ... But everywhere the door was slammed in my face. This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor and the destitute' (1.123).

Narendra's failure to secure a job caused some of his old friends who prospered in life by unfair means to ask him to join them. Other temptations also came in his way. 'A rich woman sent me an ugly proposal to end my days of penury, which I sternly rejected with scorn. Another

woman also made similar overtures to me' (1.124). The answer Narendra gave to all such overtures was typical of the undying spirit in him: 'You have wasted your life seeking the pleasures of the flesh. ... Give up all these filthy desires and remember God (ibid.). While his intrinsic faith in himself and God remained intact, the trying situation he was in undoubtedly took its toll on him, and an element of doubt crept into his mind as to the justice and mercy of God. One morning he, in pursuance of his regular ritual, took the name of God before going out in search of a job. At that time he asked why under the rule of a merciful God so much misery and suffering was present in the world.

One evening, after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain I was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind; overpowered with exhaustion and unable to move a step forward, I sank down on the outer plinth of a house by the roadside. I can't say whether I was insensible for a time or not. ... Suddenly I felt as if by some divine power the coverings of my soul were being removed one after another. All my former doubts regarding the coexistence of divine justice and mercy, and the presence of misery in the creation of a Blissful Providence, were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all and was satisfied. ... I was convinced that I was not born like ordinary people to earn money and maintain a family, much less strive for sense-pleasures. I began secretly to prepare myself to renounce the world like my grandfather. I fixed a day for the purpose (1.126).

Having decided to renounce the world Narendra felt that he could, in good conscience, give effect to his decision only if he was able to do something for the maintenance of his family. At this point of time Sri Ramakrishna intervened, pleading with Narendra to the following effect: 'I know you have come for the Mother's



work, and won't be able to live a worldly life; but for my sake, stay in the world as long as I live' (1.127). Narendra implored Sri Ramakrishna to offer a prayer to Goddess Kali on his behalf for a solution of the financial hardships of his family. Sri Ramakrishna insisted that the cure lay in Narendra praying directly to her: 'Go to Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother, and ask of Her any boon you like. It shall be granted' (ibid.).

Narendra then said: 'Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes on the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the perennial fountain of Divine Love and Beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed, "Mother, give me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have the uninterrupted vision of Thee!"' (1.128).

In the wake of his offering prayers to the Divine Mother, a serene peace reigned in Narendra's soul: 'The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart' (ibid.).

How was it that a believer of a formless God now prostrated before Goddess Kali, which he once termed absurd? And how was it that after being sent repeatedly to the goddess to offer prayer towards the solution of the financial difficulties of his family, he forgot, saying instead that he wanted nothing but knowledge and devotion? Could it be that Sri Ramakrishna had a hand in it? Narendra said to Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, it is you who have cast a charm over my mind and make me forgetful. Now please grant me the boon that my people at home may no longer suffer the pinch of poverty' (ibid.). As he persisted, Sri Ramakrishna said at long last, 'All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing' (ibid.).





This episode, a landmark in the process of Narendra's transformation, is significant in that it indicated he could never be a dry sannyasin and would never leave his family without first ensuring that the grinding poverty of his mother and brothers was taken care of. Such an orientation also foreshadowed that Narendra would be disposed in the future to turn the whole of humanity into his family, working selflessly for the development of all its members. It was also significant in that Narendra, who disliked Kali, was now turned into, to use his own term, a 'slave' of Kali. His acceptance of Kali signified a qualitative elevation in his conception of God. He now accepted that God could be with form, that God, whom he had so long thought of as merciful, could also be terrible, and that Brahman, Kali, Shiva, and Shakti are different aspects of the one and the same Reality.

Narendra now accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru. The greatness of the man whom he once termed as a 'brain-sick baby' now dawned on him. He now believed Sri Ramakrishna could really bring light to him by leading him 'from doubt to certitude, from anguish of mind to the peace of vision, from the seething vortex of the world to the grand expanse of universal Oneness' (1.97). If it were not for his guru's intervention, Narendra could have renounced the world in the manner his grandfather had done. However, Sri Ramakrishna made him first accept Kali, the executive power of Brahman, before letting him go for the sannyasin's path of renunciation. 'Had Narendranath left the world at that time—before accepting Kali—he would have, like thousands of sadhus, striven for his own salvation, but would not have become Swami Vivekananda, whose motto was, briefly, *atmanah mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha* (for the liberation of one's own soul and the good the world).'

<sup>15</sup>

### **The Development of Humanity**

'You have come for the Mother's work', was the refrain of Sri Ramakrishna in relation to Narendranath. How he set Narendra to this mission of working for the good of the world could be seen from another episode that took place in 1884. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar, surrounded by devotees including Narendra. Sri Ramakrishna outlined three basic tenets of Vaishnavism: (i) delight in the name of God, (ii) compassion for all beings, and (iii) service to the devotees of Vishnu. As Sri Ramakrishna uttered the words 'compassion for all beings', he passed into ecstasy. He then made the profound observation that since showing compassion often involved a patronizing attitude and sometimes even an arrogant one, it is not compassion for others but service to all human beings. In other words, serving Shiva in the jiva should be the goal.

Serving Shiva in the jiva demands knowledge of Vedanta and demands both devotion and activity. This means that what Sri Ramakrishna pronounced was the doctrine of the harmony of the paths of knowledge, devotion, action, and concentration. Narendra reflected on the words of his Master: 'The usual idea is that the practice of the knowledge of Vedanta demands a complete withdrawal from society and a rooting out of all such sentiments as love, devotion and compassion. ... But from those words of wisdom that the Master uttered in an ecstatic mood, I have understood that the ideal of Vedanta lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practised even at home and applied to all aspects of daily life.'

<sup>16</sup>

Having grasped the significance of his Master's message, Narendra proclaimed his resolution in the following words: 'If it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth to the world at large. I

shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the Brahman and the Pariah' (1.139-40).

The episode narrated gives us the roots of the doctrine of practical Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda preached. It also became the foundation of the motto '*atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*' that he gave the Ramakrishna Order.

Now, the question is: how did Narendra resolve the traditional conflict between the goals of *atma-moksha*, personal liberation, and *jagad-hita*, the good of the world? Did he get any light from his Master on this count? For an answer to this question we have to see what transpired between the Master and the disciple when one day in early 1886, during the Master's critical illness at the Cossipore garden house, Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra what he wanted. Narendra replied that he wanted to remain absorbed in samadhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the normal plane to eat a little food.

At this, Sri Ramakrishna rebuked the beloved disciple in the following words: 'Fie upon you! You are a big receptacle. Does it befit you to speak like that? I thought you were like a huge banyan tree and would give shelter to thousands of weary souls. Instead of that, you are seeking for your own *mukti*. Do not think such small things, my boy. How can you be with such a one-sided ideal? My *forte* is all-sidedness. ... I enjoy the Lord not only in samadhi as Brahman but also in his various forms through sweet human relationships. Do you likewise.'<sup>17</sup>

Three or four days before he entered into *mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886, Sri Ramakrishna transferred all his spiritual powers to his beloved Narendra, telling the disciple: 'Today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only

after that will you go where you came from.'<sup>18</sup>


In this final act of benediction Sri Ramakrishna resolved the last trace of conflict between personal liberation and the good of the world in Narendra's mind. The issue was not the one *or* the other, but the one *in* the other.

With the blessings of the guru and the powers transferred to him, Narendra, now Swami Vivekananda, set himself to pursuing his ordained mission: the development of humankind. His unique message taught that people's real nature is divine. Personal development therefore meant elevation and transformation in terms of one's own real nature. Swami Vivekananda's means to remove the misery of humans had two components: (i) selflessly serving human beings, especially the poor and the downtrodden, with a view to lifting them up both materially and spiritually, and (ii) fortifying all human beings with the conviction that everyone had the infinite power of the Atman already in them. Realizing one's own potential in terms of faith, strength, and service characterizes human development.

Human development in terms of faith in Self entails Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic approach to human development. Development in terms of strength and service indicates Swamiji's 'manliness' approach.

To sum up the thesis, if Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda differed in some ways, as pointed out at the beginning of this article, the differences were superficial. The underlying and essential oneness was always there, as their union was prompted by their soulful yearning to usher in a new age of spirituality for the development of all humanity. Sister Nivedita once commented on the oneness of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda:

It was said that ... 'Ramakrishna had lived for the making of Vivekananda.' Is it indeed so? Or

is it not rather impossible to distinguish with such fixity between one part and another, in a single mighty utterance of the Divine Mother-Heart? Often, it appears to me, in studying all these lives, that there had been with us a soul named Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, and that in the penumbra of his being, appear many forms, some of which are with us still, and of none of them it could be said with entire truth that here ends, in relation to him, the sphere of those others, or that there begins his own.<sup>19</sup> 

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# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications

## **Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda on Buddha and Buddhism**

Subhas Chandra Saha

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Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara, Head-  
quarters: 4A, Bankim Chatterjee  
Street, Kolkata 700 073. Website:  
[www.mahabodhiindia.com](http://www.mahabodhiindia.com). 2013.  
64 pp. ₹ 75.

It is well known that Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda, the two towering monks of the Ramakrishna Order, were eloquent exponents of Vedanta and propagated it not only in India but in other countries, particularly the US, as well. Few people know that these two eminent sannyasins had great admiration and veneration for Buddha and his gospel and delivered scholarly lectures on Buddhism. The book under review marshals copious facts of the influence of Buddha's thought in the lives of the great two monks. The narrative of Professor (Dr) Subhas Chandra Saha, the learned author, is lucid, passionate, and informative.

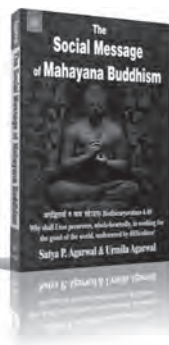
The first chapter, captioned 'Buddha in Vivekananda's Life', describes Swamiji's cathartic vision of ascetic Buddha in the course of his meditation and how he delighted in discussing about Buddha and his message with his brother disciples. The story of his visit to Bodh Gaya and his fascination for Tathagata's teachings are vividly narrated. In the second chapter, entitled 'Vivekananda's Lectures on Buddha', the author focuses on Swamiji's lectures eulogizing Buddha's personality, philosophy, and matchless spiritual service to humankind. Swamiji's pregnant remark that Buddha is not so much an individual as a state of realization sums up his insight into Buddha's personality.

The third and fourth chapters deal with Swami Abhedananda's amazing understanding of Buddha, his philosophy, and the historical development of

Buddhism. The appeal of Buddhism to vast masses, the glory of Buddhist doctrines as a force for peace and happiness, the dominance of Buddhism in China, Burma, Siam, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, and other countries, and the renown of Buddha as a saviour and redeemer—all these points came out brilliantly in Swami Abhedananda's eloquent lectures. Other topics that the swami elaborates in his lectures are the moving story of Buddha's renunciation of worldly joys; his tireless quest for Truth; his firm resolve to attain the precious *bodhi*, the highest spiritual enlightenment; his teachings regarding charity, morality, and compassion; his preaching in memorable and simple words; his five commandments of pure spiritual life and stress on selflessness, subdual of passions, and eschewal of lust, bitterness, and illusion; and his institutionalization of monasticism.

The absorbing book is valuable for the insight it provides into the catholicity of outlook of two outstanding Vedantic monks in extolling Buddhism. Arresting photographs of Buddha, Swamiji, and Abhedananda add to the significance of the volume. Though different in their metaphysical texture, Vedanta and Buddhism unite in their final teachings of equality, service, love, and compassion. The author deserves praise for highlighting the large-heartedness of the two Vedantic monks in exalting the merits of a school of philosophy considered by many as atheistic and rival to Vedanta.

N Hariharan  
Madurai



## **The Social Message of Mahayana Buddhism**

Satya P Agarwal and  
Urmila Agarwal

New Age Books, A-44, Naraina Industrial Area Phase-I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: [www.newagebooksindia.com](http://www.newagebooksindia.com). 2012. xi + 191 pp. ₹ 500.



*The Social Message of Mahayana Buddhism* has its base in two classics of Buddhism: the *Saddharma Pundarika*, 'The Lotus Sutra', and Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. The authors were closely associated with Allan Watts, the eminent Buddhist scholar, and John Bondurant, a well-known Gandhian. Their scholarly association for over six decades with these two eminent personalities gave the authors an insight to discern the social aspect of Mahayana Buddhism, which has sustained this religion over the centuries. The volume is dedicated to both these mentors.

The Sanskrit text of *Saddharma Pundarika* was published in the series 'The Sacred Books of the East' by Max Müller during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This is a major text of Mahayana Buddhism, being its earliest extant Chinese translation by Kumarajiva and his team in 406 CE.

In the course of their research, the authors found that Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* is equally cogent in delivering Buddha's message of service to society. They have often compared the specific shlokas of the Bhagavadgita that explicitly depict the thrust of the message of Sri Krishna for social harmony and mental peace.

Chapter three, titled 'Spiritual and Secular Aspects of the Message', is replete with citations that endorse Buddha's message of contributing to the good of the world.

Chapter four deals with the five methods of implementing Buddha's social message: (i) spreading of the message, (ii) motivation and inspiration, (iii) non-violent action and perseverance, (iv) worship and prayer, and (v) meditation and dedication. All these thoughts are beautifully laid in sonorous *gathas*, verses, and the reader finds it easy to absorb Buddha's living message.

Chapters five to eight describe the application of Buddha's social message as implemented in China, Japan, Korea, Nepal, and Tibet. The development of Buddhism in China from the third century BCE to the present day is traced in this chapter.

The practical implementation of Buddha's idea of human regeneration is the main theme of the book and the two scholarly authors have driven this message home by tracing the subsequent history of Buddhism in several nations.

Therefore, this study is also helpful for comparing the variations in the religious practices in these nations.

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**Balanced Yoga:  
The Twelve-week Programme**  
Svami Purna

New Age Books, 2012. 144 pp. ₹ 175.

The world of books on yoga is a multifaceted one. Yoga is a subject that has attracted many authors to give their opinion on it. But the original expounder of yoga is Maharishi Patanjali.

*Balanced Yoga: The Twelve-week Programme*, by Svami Purna, also tries to bring home the finer points of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* but in a more relaxed and composed format. From the very beginning it states that it will be a prolonged twelve-week programme to learn all about yoga. The book's contents very specifically enlist the subjects dealt with in the names of the chapters. It starts with general notions on yoga, like breathing techniques, and even includes the involvement of children as part of the yoga movement. The subjects of the main body of the book have been segmented in chapters-weeks, so as to systematically explain what to be practised and how. Lastly, it also mentions purna yoga, tips on meditation, eye exercises, various yogic mudras, and so forth.

In the preface itself the author clarifies that the book is a manual of yoga practice, with clear illustrations and concise texts, designed to provide expert guidance to both the complete beginner and the more experienced practitioner of yoga. The title 'Balanced Yoga' has been chosen to indicate that while the emphasis is on hatha yoga, the yoga of the physical body, one will also find guidance and simple exercises to bring about mental and emotional growth. The author opined that this programme is intended as a practical aid, so that diligent practice will bring positive results and uncover the best in an individual.

The chapter 'What Is Yoga' dwells on yoga's multifarious aspects, and cautions that 'yoga is not a religion, a political movement, or dogma. It is a way of bringing harmony within diversity. It respects all cultures, creeds, and nations. It nurtures the higher instincts of humanity—compassion, cooperation and peace' (8). The chapter also explains that 'the term "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* meaning "union" or "yoke". It implies harmony and balance between all aspects of creation; the impulses and inclinations of the ever-wavering mind being brought under the discriminating yoke of the Higher Self' (ibid.).

The chapter 'About the Postures (*Asanas*)' very rightly points out that 'you must not rush; you must not grow lazy. If your effort is regular and balanced, you will truly enjoy the practice of yoga' (10). The chapter 'The Breath of Life' explains that 'the lack of prana or life-force resulting from inefficient breathing reduces one's natural energy level. To breathe effectively, inhale through the nose, keep an upright posture, avoid highly polluted surroundings' (ibid.) and so forth.

Prior to the presentation of the whole programme, some useful advice is given before starting any yoga practice, also recommending to keep a diary of how one's body and mind respond to the different postures or breathing exercises. The golden rule of all yogic postures is to perform each exercise slowly, carefully, and mindfully; force and strain must be avoided at all times. This is also stressed at the outset.

From week one to twelve the yoga practices are enumerated along with pictures that visually illustrate the text, which makes each practice more accessible. Simultaneously the author remarks basic tips like personal hygiene; the conscious intake of food, water, and air; the proper elimination of waste elements; the control of one's thoughts and emotions—all tips that determine both the quality and the quantity of the life energy we achieve.

Very interestingly for a book on yoga, the author presents the after-effects of each and every yogic posture practice, providing its positive effects and accurate notes of caution. The great benefits of practising Surya Namaskar or Bhastrika are vividly highlighted. For instance, the effects of practising Bhastrika, which literally

means the 'bellows', are explained thus: 'The performance of The Bellows brings additional blessing to those who struggle with unwanted thoughts. In the presence of this fire, an old thought can be "burnt up", to be replaced by a new and healthy thought' (66). Similarly the virtues of the Dhanurasana, the Bow Pose, have been extolled: 'The Bow is often called the anti-ageing pose, due to its pronounced effect on the endocrine system. The stimulation of the gonads (sex glands) postpones the onset of menopause and old age. The pose is highly beneficial to diabetics due to the stimulation of the pancreas and increased release of insulin. It is also good for those suffering from thyroid deficiency and slow comprehension' (71).

There is a separate chapter on meditation dealing with the seven chakras within our bodies and the benefits of activating and balancing these centres to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. At the end of the book instructions on standing, sitting, and other stretching exercises and their benefits are also mentioned. Instructions on eye exercises, shoulder and hip exercises, as well as the effects of various mudras on one's well-being has been provided as well.

The book is printed on good quality paper and has plenty of drawings to support the practice of perfect yoga without the presence of a physical guide. In this lies the efficacy and real value of the book.

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## BOOK RECEIVED



### ***The Garden of Love: Mystical Symbolism in Layla Majnun & Gita Govinda***

Nizami and Jaideva,  
trans. Lalita Sinha

New Age Books. 2011. xviii + 208 pp.  
₹ 195.

These two twelfth-century mystical poems—one of Persian and the other of Indian origin—have amply influenced the Asian mind for centuries.

# REPORTS



## Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Chennai Math:** A special programme at Vandavasi, Tiruvannamalai district, on 1 December 2013, in which nearly 700 students of the free coaching centres run by the centre participated. A meeting of about 650 non-governmental organizations working in Tamil Nadu on 15 December. **Cherrapunji:** 3 youth conventions in November and 8 in December, in which 5,983 youths participated. An inter-school football tournament from 2 to 14 December, in which students from 23 secondary and higher secondary schools took part. A classical music concert on 19 December, attended by about 500 people. **Coimbatore Mission:** A regional youth convention from 28 to 30 November, in which 1,502 delegates from South India participated. **Cooch Behar:** A two-day programme, in collaboration with Ramakrishna Mission Lokashiksha Parishad, Narendrapur, for the promotion of tribal and folk culture on 22 and 23 December, attended by about 1,400 people. **New Delhi:** 41 puppet shows on Swamiji from 8 November to 12 December in Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh with the help of our centres in those states. A value education workshop on 7 December, attended by nearly



*Chhau dance, unveiling of newly installed bronze statue of Swamiji, and classical music concert at Jamshedpur*

500 principals and teachers of the Central Board of Secondary Education schools. **Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata:** A devotees' convention on 21 November, attended by 375 devotees. **Hyderabad:** The final round of the 'Swami Vivekananda Youth Leadership Contest-2013' on 23 November, in which 16 students selected out of 290 students from 24 senior secondary schools and junior colleges participated. 2 youth conventions on the theme 'Transforming the Youth to Transform India' on the centre's premises on 9 November and 18 December and another youth convention on the same theme at Bhimavaram on 5 December; 4,150 youths participated in the conventions. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** An international seminar on 'Cultural Unity of India', from 16 to 18 December, comprising 6 academic sessions in which 14 scholars presented their papers; the inaugural session was attended by 400 people and the academic sessions by 100 delegates and 35 observers. **Jamshedpur:** 6 puppet shows on Swamiji from 5 to 7 December; about 3,400 people, mostly students of the schools run by the centre, watched the shows. A *chhau* dance performance on 19 December, attended by around 600 people. Classical music concerts on 21 and 22 December; about 1,000 people attended the programme. **Kanpur:** A

sports meet on 20 and 21 December, in which 21 teams from different schools took part. **Limbdi:** Cultural competitions from 16 to 19 December, in which 129 students from 18 schools took part. **Lucknow:** A regional youth convention from 6 to 8 December, in which nearly 4,000 delegates from 7 states in North India—Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand—participated. Sri B L Joshi, governor of Uttar Pradesh, delivered the valedictory address. **Madurai:** A value education programme for parents at 2 schools in Madurai and another at a school in a remote village of Thanjavur district on 21 and 23 November and 11 December; in all, 405 parents took part in the programmes. **Manasadwip:** A teachers' convention on 24 November, in which 83 teachers from 49 schools participated. A spiritual retreat on 15 December, attended by about 250 devotees. **Ootacamund:** An interfaith dialogue on 9 December, in which 550 delegates took part. Several cultural programmes were also held on this occasion. **Port Blair:** A state-level youth convention on 14 December, in which 850 youths participated. **Puri Mission:** A state-level youth convention on 22 December, in which about 600 youths took part. **Rajahmundry:** 'Sanatana Dharma Sadassu', a convention on Hinduism, from 14 to 16 December, in which spiritual leaders of various Hindu denominations and groups participated; about 3,600 people attended the convention. A state-level youth convention from 18 to 20 December, in which about 5,500 youths took part. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Puppet shows on Swamiji in 7 places in Ranchi and Bokaro districts; in all, about 9,300 people watched the shows. **Salem:** Value education programmes for parents in Namakkal district and Salem on 7 and 10 December; in all, 112 parents attended the programmes. **Saradapitha, Belur:** In collaboration with West Bengal Correctional Services,

the centre organized a drama on Swami Vivekananda enacted by 31 prisoners of Presidency and Alipore Central Correctional Homes on 4 December at an auditorium in Kolkata; about 800 people attended the programme. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** On the centre's initiative 9 public meetings were held at different places in West Bengal from 22 November to 20 December; in all, about 3,750 people attended the programmes. A regional seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda's Relevance to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century' on 30 November, attended by 750 people belonging to seven states. **Vadodara:** A regional convention on tribal and folk culture on 1 and 2 December, in which about 1,100 tribal youths from 6 states and a large number of devotees participated.

### **News from Branch Centres**

Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, inaugurated the newly built auditorium at **Ramakrishna Math, Kanchipuram**, on 29 November.

On 3 December, the International Day of People with Disability, the Government of Tamil Nadu honoured 2 beneficiaries of the Leprosy Afflicted Persons rehabilitation programme of **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, for their self-reliance; each of them was given a gold medal and a citation.

Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, unveiled the newly installed 7 ½-foot bronze statue of Swamiji at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Society, Jamshedpur**, on 19 December.

On 26 December Swami Suhitananda declared open the following at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore:** (i) a maintenance department building, (ii) the Industrial Training Institute classrooms building, (iii) a basketball-cum-badminton court of the



College of Arts and Science, and (iv) an indoor synthetic tennis stadium of the Maruthi College of Physical Education.

The annual convocation of **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University** for the faculties of Disability Management and Special Education and General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga was held at the University's faculty centre at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** on 26 December, in which 118 and 141 successful candidates respectively of the above two faculties were awarded certificates and degrees from diploma to doctoral levels. Swami Suhitananda, the chancellor of the University, gave the benedictory address, while the convocation address was delivered by Dr Kaushik Basu, Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist, World Bank.

The UNESCO Chair in the area of 'Inclusive Adapted Physical Education and Yoga', which is the first of its kind in this field in Asia, was formally inaugurated at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University's** faculty centre at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** on 26 December by Dr Bikash Sanyal, Vice Chairman, UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara**, felicitated 59 gold medallists of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda on 25 December.

### Achievements

Association of Energy Engineers India Chapter has awarded 'Energy Professional Development Award' to **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi**, for its contribution in creating awareness about renewable and non-conventional energy resources as well as harnessing them. The award was handed over on 14 December, the National Energy Conservation

Day, at a function organized by the Energy Management Department, Indian Institute of Social Welfare and Business Management, Kolkata.

### Relief

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Cooch Behar**: 270 saris and 163 dhotis on 4 November, and 120 saris, 120 dhotis, and 120 lungis on 22 November. **Gourhati**: 399 saris from 29 September to 10 December. **Ichapur**: 50 kg rice from 1 to 8 December. **Karimganj**: 150 saris, 300 dhotis, and 150 plates on 15 December. **Narottam Nagar**: 58 T-shirts, 38 pyjamas, and 122 pants on 8 December. **Ootacamund**: School uniforms, shoes, and study materials to 165 school children.

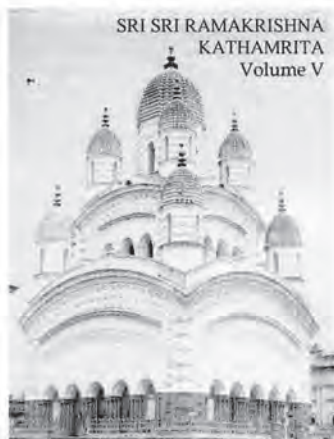
**Economic Rehabilitation** • **Khetri** centre distributed 27 sewing machines to needy people on 24 December.

**Phailin Cyclone Relief** • **Tamluk** centre distributed 1,000 blankets among an equal number of families affected by Phailin Cyclone in 18 villages/areas of Purba Medinipur district from 27 November to 1 December.

**Refugee Relief** • On 28 December **Lucknow** centre distributed chira, gur, bread, bananas, and blankets to 44 families camping in Mobaiya area of Lucknow, as they have been uprooted from their homeland along the LOC in Baramulla district of Kashmir owing to hostile environment there.

**Winter Relief** • The following centres distributed 7,411 blankets to the needy. **Baranagar Math**: 500, 24 and 27 Nov. **Bhopal**: 150, 24 Dec. **Cherrapunji**: 150, 29 Dec. **Cooch Behar**: 400, 26 Dec. **Cossipore**: 400, 25 Oct. to 26 Nov. **Gadadhar Ashrama**: 230, 28 Nov. to 7 Dec. **Garbeta**: 550, 11 to 25 Dec. **Gourhati**: 390, 29 Sep. to 10 Dec. **Ichapur**: 500, 1 to 8 Dec. **Indore**: 425, 22 Dec. **Jalpaiguri**: 250, 24 Nov. **Jamtara**: 399, 8 to 28 Nov. **Karimganj**: 150, 15 Dec. **Khetri**: 166, 22 and 24 Dec. **Malda**: 700, Nov. and Dec. **Manasadwip**: 350, 8 to 21 Dec. **Naora**: 500, 13 to 18 Dec. **Narottam Nagar**: 245, 28 to 30 Dec. **Ootacamund**: 296, 6 Nov. to 15 Dec. **Tamluk**: 660, 26 Nov. to 5 Dec. Besides, **Narottam Nagar** distributed 354 sweaters, 34 woollen caps, and 150 warm vests from 6 to 8 December.

PS



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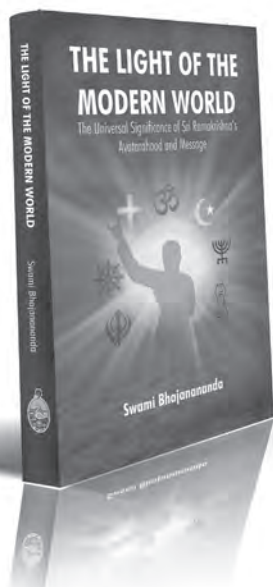
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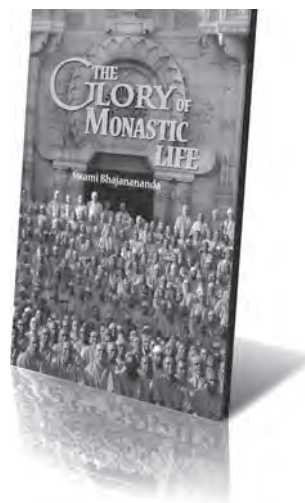
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### **Synopsis of the Annual General Meeting of Ramakrishna Mission, 2013**

The 104th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, the 15 December 2013 at 3.30 p.m.

Bhagwan Mahaveer Foundation, Chennai, selected our Itanagar hospital for the 15th Mahaveer Award for excellence in the sphere of community and social service. Chhattisgarh Government conferred the Dr Bhanwar Singh Porte Memorial Award for Tribal Service for the year 2012, on our Narainpur centre.

In commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the inaugural function of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration was organized by Ministry of Culture, Government of India, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on 12 January 2013. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) awarded Vivekananda School of Excellence Awards to 40 schools, including six of our schools affiliated to CBSE. The four-year-long service programmes started in different parts of the country in 2010 continued. A sum of Rs. 51.77 crore was spent on these central government-aided service projects from 08.10.2010 to 30.06.2013. A brief report is given here.

During the year under review, the Mission started a New centre at Kothar, Odisha. Outside India, New Mission centres were started at Kathmandu in Nepal and at Bagerhat and Mymensingh, in Bangladesh. A branch centre of Ramakrishna Math was started at Comilla, Bangladesh and a branch centre of both Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was started at Jessore, Bangladesh. A new Mission sub-centre of Nadi (Fiji) Ashrama was started at Suva, Fiji. In educational field, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) Narendrapur College was awarded 'A' grade (the highest grade) by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC); (ii) the Polytechnic College of Chennai Students' Home was conferred the NIQR-TVN Kidao Outstanding Educational Institution Award by the National Institution for Quality and Reliability (NIQR), Chennai; (iii) Vivekananda Centenary College of Rahara started MSc course in Botany affiliated to West Bengal State University, Barasat. In medical field, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) Inauguration of Speech Therapy Unit and addition of Optical Coherence Tomograph (OCT) Machine, Neonatal Bubble CPAP System, Automatic Peritoneal Dialysis Machine, etc in Lucknow hospital; (ii) Starting of a High Dependency Unit with 8 beds, which is similar to Intensive Care Unit (ICU), at Varanasi Home of Service; (iii) Addition of X-ray, Ultrasonography and Pathology departments to the dispensary of Sargachhi centre; (iv) Addition of I-Stat analyzer and Bilicheck system to the laboratory, Arthroscope and Laparoscope equipment to the operation theatre of our Itanagar hospital. In rural development field, the following new projects deserve special mention: (i) Narainpur centre commenced seven trades in its Industrial Training Institute (ITI), constructed 20 check dams, dug 20 bore wells, etc.; (ii) Sargachhi centre started a Skill Development Institute (SDI) to offer training in various courses approved by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Govt. of India. Under the Math, the following new projects deserve special mention: (i) Inauguration of an exhibition 'Sri Ramakrishna Divya Lila Pradarshani' at Balaram Mandir, Kolkata; (ii) Addition of a Fully Automatic Biochemistry Analyzer and a Dental Chair by Pune Math to its Clinic; (iii) A workshop for village tribals by Ponnampet centre. Outside India, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) Two new buildings, namely Boys' Home Study Hall and Sri Sarada Nursery School Building, at the Batticaloa sub-centre of Colombo (Sri Lanka) Mission; (ii) Baliati centre in Bangladesh constructed Monks' Quarters and Dispensary building; (iii) Inauguration of newly constructed shrine-chapel at Providence (USA) centre. During the year, the Mission and Math undertook several relief and rehabilitation programmes in different parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs. 2.26 crore, benefiting 4.94 lakh people belonging to around 1 lakh families in 415 villages. Welfare work was done by way of providing scholarships to poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people, etc (about 36.30 lakh beneficiaries); the expenditure incurred was Rs. 11.55 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 80.20 lakh people through 15 hospitals, 125 dispensaries, 60 mobile medical units and 953 medical camps; the expenditure incurred was Rs. 146.37 crore.

Nearly 3.29 lakh students were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level, non-formal education centres, night schools, coaching classes, etc. A sum of Rs. 251.88 crore was spent on educational work. A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs. 41.26 crore benefiting about 42.67 lakh rural people. We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and help. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary



**Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda: A brief progress report of the Central-Government-grant-aided service projects from 08.10.2010 to 30.06.2013**

1. Print Media Project : Printed 11.97 lakh copies of books on Swamiji's life and teachings in 23 languages and 13.25 lakh copies of 17 other titles in 10 languages. A sum of Rs. 425.17 lakh was spent. 2. Cultural Programmes Project: Organized seven state-level seminars on religious harmony, interfaith dialogues in five states, Conferences on Unity in Diversity in three states and three regional programme on tribal and folk culture. A sum of Rs. 180.25 lakh was spent. 3. Electronic Media Project: Audio DVDs on 'Personality Development' and 'Education as viewed by Swami Vivekananda' with multimedia effect were produced. A Documentary Feature 'A Poet, a Man, a Monk' on Swami Vivekananda and his teachings in digital format is nearing completion. A sum of Rs. 144.57 lakh was spent. 4. Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakalpa (Integrated Child Development): 174 units started in 23 states. About 17,500 children were benefited. A sum of Rs. 1,739.95 lakh was spent. 5. Vivekananda Swasthya Parisheva Prakalpa (Health Services Project for Mothers & Children): 126 units started in 22 states. About 13,000 children were benefited. A sum of Rs. 1,174.67 lakh was spent. 6. Sarada Palli Vikas Prakalpa (Women Self-Empowerment): 10 units started in 8 states. In all, 1619 women were benefited. A sum of Rs. 168.81 lakh was spent. 7. Swami Akhandananda Seva Prakalpa (Poverty Alleviation): 10 units started in 6 states. Altogether 1135 people were benefited. A sum of Rs. 160.44 lakh was spent. 8. Special Programmes for the Youth: Started 10 Youth Counseling Cells in 8 states; Organized National Level Youth Convention at Narainpur (Chhattisgarh) with 4600 participants; Held 6 Regional Level Youth Competitions / Conventions – total participants: 12,489 from 11 States; Organized State Level Youth Competitions in 8 states – total participants: 1,60,346; Conducted Sustained Graded Value Education Programmes through (a) 402 units (Non-formal type) in 14 states with 17,006 students of 260 institutions; printed 15.49 lakh books for 182 titles in five languages and (b) 2,539 units (Classroom-based) in 16 states with 1,12,577 students of 727 schools; printed 1.17 lakh textbooks in ten major languages of India for Class V to IX and Class XI. A sum of Rs. 1182.96 lakh was spent.

In all, a sum of Rs. 51.77 crore was spent on the above projects.

**Missing Credits in the January 2014 Issue**



**Page 14: 'The Master and the Cosmic Harmony', by Anita Bose  
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**Page 20: 'Reverie',  
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**Page 28: 'The Renaissance',  
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Watercolour (wash)**



**Page 32: 'Untitled',  
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**Page 45: 'The Tranquility',  
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Serigraph**



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